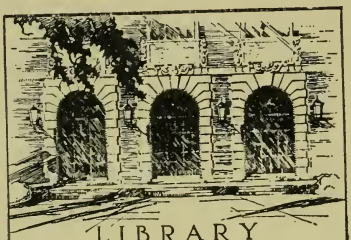
How They Loved Him

by

Florence Marryat



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HOW THEY LOVED HIM.

A NOVEL.

BY

FLORENCE MARRYAT

(Mrs Francis Lean).

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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HOW THEY LOVED HIM.

CHAPTER I.

AGAIN.

'Ever since that day—that fatal day—
My soul has known no rest. The venom'd shaft
Still rankles in my bosom.'—*Crisp.*

THE two years which he had spent in Africa had had a great effect upon the mind of Sir Gilbert Conroy. His ready acceptance of the governorship of Sovooranooko had been a matter of much surprise to his friends, but he had never confided (even to Lady Marjoram) the reason for his doing so. The fact is, he had not found

his marriage with Fenella answer the purpose for which he entered into it. It has been said that at that time Sir Gilbert had been for many years in the toils of an unprincipled woman, from whom he could not free himself. He had been filling the unenviable post (which so many men, otherwise men of honour, can apparently reconcile it to their consciences to fill) of lover to the wife, and friend to the husband; and since the latter was fool enough (or knave enough) to allow it, society glossed the *liason* over, and only shrugged her shoulders and smiled furtively when Mrs Messiter's *cher ami* followed her into ball or concert room. At last, however, Sir Gilbert's better angel, or some happy accident, revealed him to himself, and, standing aghast at the discovery of his own degraded position, he resolved to abandon it. But this was easier said than done. It is no slight task to break the bonds of half a lifetime with discretion

and decency; and finding that remonstrance, and persuasion, and appeals to her generosity to let him go free were of no avail, he did what many a man has done under similar circumstances,—he put another woman between himself and his abusive, reproachful, hysterical *inamorata* —he married Fenella Barrington. After that, of course, there was nothing more to be said or done. All applications from Mrs Messiter were met by an allusion to his wife. The lady saw that the game was over, and soon turned her attention to something more profitable. And then (strange as it may appear to those who are not versed in the contradictions of the human heart) Sir Gilbert became discontented, because the means he had adopted to get rid of Mrs Messiter had proved successful. He did not love her. All the freshness and romance of their attachment had died out years and years before; but he had grown used to her society, and he missed it. Fenella,

with her childish ideas regarding men and women, and her soft, melancholy manner, was no substitute for the dashing beauty who had known everybody and everything, and was always in the highest and boldest of spirits.

So Sir Gilbert had had this unworthy regret gnawing at his heart during the first year of his marriage. But he had no intention of renewing his acquaintance with Mrs Messiter, nor any desire to do so. He recognised the fact that if he saw her again, after having associated with Fenella, he should be utterly disgusted with her ways and manners; and he resolved to stamp out the last bonds of her unholy thrall. It was with this idea that he had so eagerly accepted the government of Sovooranooko, and left England and his young wife behind him. He had hoped that the new scenes, and the duties of his appointment, and the excitement of sport might have the effect of entirely eradicating the last faint lines

of Mrs Messiter's image from his mind, and his hope had been realised. He returned home a free man—free to value his wife above all other women, and to appreciate the grace and dignity with which she supported the position to which he had raised her. He found her also wonderfully improved in appearance, or, perhaps, his eyes were clearer now to see the somewhat quiet beauties she had always possessed.

But Fenella at twenty had fulfilled more than the promise she had given at sixteen. Her form had ripened to statuesque proportions; she could not move an arm or hand without displaying some new curve of beauty; and her skin was a marvel of creamy white. Her features, too, had refined and softened with the passing years. Her face was a perfect oval; her mouth had a tender droop in it, and her eyes a dreamy languor, which gave her a pensive expression that won the hearts of all who saw her; and her sunny hair was piled

about her head in an easy classical fashion that gave her the appearance of an Olympian goddess. Dressed in white, with the sunny fairness of her arms and neck unveiled, Lady Conroy was always a remarkable woman in a drawing-room, and even her own sex would allow there was something 'very sweet' about her. And no less sweet did she appear when Sir Gilbert came back, to find her, in a print dress and a broad-brimmed hat, running about the gardens of Conroy Castle with her baby.

'Why, you've developed into a beauty, Fenella,' he said to her admiringly, some days after his arrival. 'It is just as well I have come home to look after you this season, or you would have been setting up a lover, like the majority of fashionable ladies.'

She blushed at the accusation.

'Oh no, Gilbert; you need not be afraid; I shall never do that.'

'I trust not; but upon my word you're too pretty to be left to yourself. I don't think I'll do it again, Fenella.'

'I hope you won't. I have been very lonely sometimes without you.'

'Oh, you had that wonderful baby to console you, and from what Janie wrote me, you seem to have had no time nor inclination to think of anybody else. But she will never be a patch upon her mother,' he continued, as little Valeria toddled up to his side.

'I hope she will be much, *much* better than I have ever been,' said Fenella, in a low voice. 'But you don't care for babies, do you, Gilbert?'

'Yes, I do—at least when they are my own. I can't say I take much interest in this creature now, but I shall be proud of her by-and-by, particularly if she grows up like you. Come here, you imp of mischief,' he cried playfully to the child, who was trying to reach an ornament from the table. 'Come and speak to your father, and let him see if he can find anything to like in you.'

But Fenella interposed between them.

'She will worry you,' she said quickly, as she rang the bell. 'She had better go back to the nursery; she is certain to do some damage if she remains here any longer.'

'Why, you're growing quite a fashionable mother, I declare,' laughed Sir Gilbert, as the nurse carried the child away. 'From what Janie said, I expected to find a *bassinette* in the drawing-room, and a rocking-horse in the dining-room, and the whole household assembled at stated periods (as if for family prayers) to worship the rising sun.'

'Janie talks such nonsense sometimes,' replied Fenella, with a look of annoyance. 'Because baby was delicate at one time, and required my whole attention, she imagines she will always claim it. But, indeed, now that you have come home, Gilbert, I will not allow her to be the least annoyance to you. She shall live in the nurseries, if you wish it to be so.'

'No; don't make me out a domestic

tyrant, Fenella. I shall like to see the child at reasonable times as much as anybody. Besides, I want her to grow fond of me. I am afraid I have long arrears to make up in that particular.'

But although Sir Gilbert was sincere in this assertion, and constantly asked for the child to be brought downstairs, it appeared to him as though his wife put every obstacle she could in the way of their meeting. Valeria was invariably out of doors, or asleep, or having her meals, at the very time Sir Gilbert wished to see her, until at last he grew quite annoyed on the subject, and accused Fenella of jealousy, lest the baby should grow to love him better than it did herself. And Lady Conroy would refute the accusation, and ring for the child at once in proof of her sincerity; and Valeria, with the cunning of infancy, would see there was something wrong between them, and be wilful and naughty in consequence, and the whole affair would end by Sir Gilbert

getting out of temper, and leaving the mother and child by themselves. It was after an occurrence of this sort that Bennett one day found Fenella sobbing, face downward, on her bed.

'My dear lady, whatever's the matter?' she exclaimed.

'Oh, Bennett! I must tell him—I *must* tell him,' she replied.

'Tell whom—tell *what*, my dear?'

'I must tell Sir Gilbert about—about—the child. I cannot keep the secret to myself any longer; it is tearing my very heart out.'

Eliza Bennett looked very serious.

'Miss Fenella, you'd surely never go to make such a muddle as that, would you? What! after all the pains and trouble we took together; and now at the very time when our reward has come, to go and spoil it all! What can you be thinking of?'

'Bennett, he is so good to me—he is so much kinder and more affectionate than

he was before he went away; and I can't bear to see him kissing Valeria and trying to make her fond of him in return. It drives me mad! I never could stand it for years and years together; I should go out of my mind.'

'And what do you propose to do then, my dear?' said the nurse gravely.

'I don't know—I can't tell; I only feel that I am miserable.'

'And you'd go and tell Sir Gilbert as the other one's gone, and turn that poor sweet lamb—your own flesh and blood, Miss Fenella, that's never done a wrong thing in its life—out upon the world again to fare as such children do,—God help 'em! Is that what you are wishing for, my dear?'

'Oh no, no! how *could* I? My own baby—*his* baby! Nurse, don't torture me by such a suggestion. You know that nothing on earth shall ever tempt me to forsake her.'

'What do you wish to do then, my lady?

Will you leave Sir Gilbert yourself, tell him at the same time that he hasn't wife nor child, and disgrace his family and his name for nothing?'

'No, no! but I thought, perhaps, if I seized a favourable opportunity to confess the truth, and ask him to forgive me, he *might*—(he seems so much fonder of me now, nurse, than he used to be)—he might consent to let me keep her with me still, and then my heart would be at rest for ever.'

Bennett rose from where she had been sitting, and drew herself up to her full height.

'Miss Fenella, you must forgive the words, but there is no doubt as your poor mamma was right when she said you was simple. You're as simple now, my dear, at twenty as ever you was at sixteen. You was took in then, and you'd be took in again to-morrow if you was left to yourself. What! have you lived all this time, my lady, without gaining more knowledge

of men than that? You think as Sir Gilbert would forgive you for keeping the truth from him, and let another man's child live in his house, and keep his name, and pass as his eldest daughter? My dear, simpleness is no word for it—it's sheer madness, that's what it is, and everybody who heard you would say the same.'

Lady Conroy answered nothing. She only continued to lie face downward, and sob as if her heart would break.

'You'll think better of it, Miss Fenella, won't you?' said Bennett presently. 'You won't go to get us all into such a terrible scrape, and disgrace the poor innocent baby for ever, just because you find it a bit hard to bear?'

'You must keep her away then,' she replied; 'you must keep her in the nursery, Bennett, till—till—I am more used to the idea.'

'You'll get used to it fast enough, my lady,' replied the servant. 'After all, there's many and many a nursery in the

same plight, and you've got one consolation, my dear, which few of your fashionable ladies can boast of: you've never been faithless to your husband.'

'I am faithless to him now,' moaned Fenella, as she sought in vain for some pretext to soothe the reproaches of her heart.

This feeling increased so greatly on her that she seemed at last to try and avoid even the mention of her child, and when the season commenced and they prepared to return to London, she strongly urged upon Sir Gilbert the judiciousness of leaving Valeria in Scotland with her nurses.

'London is a horrid place for a child,' she said, 'and we shall be out so much, we shall see scarcely anything of her. I shall feel so much more comfortable if she is left at Conroy Castle.'

'Just as you please, my dear,' returned Sir Gilbert good-naturedly. 'It is all the same to me, and I daresay the little lady will be better running about the gardens

than confined to a dusty square. If you can make yourself happy without her, so can I.'

Fenella heaved a big sigh. She knew she should not be happier without her little one, but she thought she should be more at her ease. So Valeria was left, with many kisses, at the Castle, and Sir Gilbert and Lady Conroy took up their residence in Portman Square.

Society found Lady Conroy still more attractive this year than she had been the last. A married woman suffers no detraction from her charms by appearing in London for several consecutive seasons. It rather adds to them than otherwise. Neither men nor women are afraid of improving their acquaintance with her. The first cannot be asked their intentions; the second have no dread lest she should interfere with theirs; and if she is agreeable and lively, and has a good house of her own, she is sure to be voted charming by all. That was the general

opinion regarding Fenella, and Sir Gilbert was proud to see her popularity. Her beautiful and well-cultivated voice made her company eagerly sought after, and when Lady Conroy stood up to sing, the whole room was hushed to hear it.

The Countess of Marjoram, who as usual was to the front with everything, was never tired of laughing at her brother for his evidently increasing admiration of his wife.

'I told you how it would be, Bertie,' she exclaimed. 'You've actually fallen in love with her at last; and what is more, I believe Fenella has fallen in love with you! I see she gets as red as a poppy whenever your name is mentioned.'

'What nonsense, Janie,' said the baronet, getting red in his turn. 'Fenella and I are far too sensible to think of such folly. I have told you as much before.'

'And I said I didn't believe you. By the way, what do you think of Miss Conroy?'

'I think she is a very pretty little girl, and she is growing quite interesting. I wanted to bring her to town with us, but Fenella fancied she would be better in the country.'

'Mercy on us! you're turning into a model papa into the bargain! Bertie, I feel convinced I shall live to see you carving a leg of mutton at one o'clock, with a dozen boys and girls sitting round the table.'

'You might live to see me doing worse things,' was all the answer he gave her, as he turned upon his heel.

Lady Marjoram's jests annoyed him more than he liked to show; for he knew that she had hit the right nail on the head. He *was* growing fonder of his wife—very much fonder. He could see the beauty of her character more clearly than he did before, and he could better appreciate the dutiful obedience she rendered him, and the gentleness with which she accepted his rebukes or his advice.

He saw her affectionate and submissive at home, brilliant and sought after in society, dignified with her inferiors, affable with her equals, and courteous to those above her, and thought she was just the sort of woman he would have chosen for Lady Conroy had he been able to select from the whole world.

One evening as they were sitting together after dinner, he told her so. They were alone; for Fenella was engaged to attend a large evening party at the Culletons', and Sir Gilbert intended to pass the time of her absence at his club. She was already dressed for leaving home in a robe of white samite, which fell in straight classical folds to her feet, her only ornaments being strings of oriental pearls woven thickly in her hair, and twisted round her neck and arms.

'Come here,' said her husband abruptly. 'Why, how fair and sweet you look, child! You might stand for a vestal virgin, or a nymph of Canova, or the goddess of youth

herself, with that smooth face of yours and these beautifully-moulded limbs! Do you know that I love you, Fenella?'

'I *hope* you do, dear Gilbert,' she murmured gratefully.

'I always did, in a measure, my dear, but not as I do now. I have had a secret from you, Fenella—something which you ought to have been told long ago; for there should never be any secrets between husband and wife.'

Fenella turned as white as the dress she wore.

'No, I suppose not,' she faltered. 'But, Gilbert, if this secret concerns only yourself—if it can hurt no one to keep it sacred—why reveal it to me? I—I—have no wish to interfere with your private affairs, dear. I—I—trust you.'

'And I trust you too, Fenella—implicitly, without reserve; yet I should be very much hurt if I thought you had any concealments from me. I did not realise this before as I do now; but my feelings

for you have undergone a great change, and there must be complete confidence between us henceforward.'

She trembled and looked down, but she did not answer him. She almost thought that he had discovered her own secret, and was about to let her know it.

'When I married you, Fenella, I did you a great wrong—a wrong which might have wrecked the happiness of both our lives; for at that time I was in love with another woman!'

He expected to see her start or look annoyed at the intelligence; but she did neither. She only answered quietly,—

'Were you, Gilbert? What a nuisance it must have been to you to have to make love to me!'

'I am afraid I did not acquit myself very creditably in that particular, Fenella. I think, on looking back, that I owe you an ample apology for having shown so little warmth towards you, so little admiration for that which appears to me now so

fair! And I am going to try and make amends by telling you the truth.'

Sir Gilbert drew her closer to him as he spoke, and, with his arm wound about her waist, related to her the whole history of his acquaintanceship with Mrs Messiter, not failing to impress the fact upon her mind that, at the present moment, he would rather go to the other end of the world than meet his former flame again.

'When I was wandering in those endless, pathless jungles, Fenella, running the momentary risk of a sudden and violent death, the scales fell from my eyes, and I was compelled to acknowledge that, were I called upon to leave this world, my whole regret would consist in leaving *you*. It was because this feeling was growing stronger every day that I resolved to return to England; it is because it is stronger in me now than it has ever been before, that I have told you this shameful story! Say that you forgive

me for not having confided it to you before I asked you to become my wife.'

'Dear Gilbert, why should you ask *me* to forgive? I, who—who—have sinned so deeply myself. Neither of us loved the other as we should have done before entering into an engagement for life.'

'But I love you now, Fenella, as much as it is in my power to love. There is a great difference in our ages—mine is almost double yours—but perhaps I can appreciate the purity and strength and nobility of your character all the better for that fact.'

Fenella grew crimson.

'Oh, Gilbert! don't praise me in that manner,' she murmured. 'I feel so ashamed of myself. You know—you *know*—I am not the good girl you would make me out to be.'

'I know there is not a better girl in all Christendom,' he replied. 'Do you suppose I never heard any more than you chose to tell me of the way in

which you behaved in my absence, Fenella? Janie could not fill her letters full enough of you! I know that you passed the ordeal of our two years' separation in a manner few young and pretty women would have done; that your behaviour was so quiet, so blameless, and so domestic, that no one was able to breathe the slightest word against you. And in this age of detraction and scandal, that is no light praise.'

'Could I have done less?' she said simply.

'Perhaps *you* couldn't, but others would have found it easy. Any way, I feel very proud of my young wife, and I thank you for it, Fenella! I trust our future life together may prove much happier, in consequence, than the past has done.'

Had Fenella carried no secret burden on her soul, these words of approbation from her husband would have made her supremely happy, but as it was, they only increased her uneasiness and pain. She

went to her party with the tears upon her cheek, and though on entering the Culletons' drawing-room she was received with acclamations of delight, and immediately surrounded by a host of admirers, the uncomfortable feeling remained with her throughout the evening.

Her husband had learned to love her, and she was not ready to return his love —she must either give it up again, or continue to receive it unworthily; such was the sad idea that occupied her mind, and made her conversation languid and *distrait.* It mingled still more freely with her songs, which seemed to ring with a passionate despair that Lady Conroy did not often exhibit in public.

The Culletons were wealthy people, who always secured the best of entertainments for their friends, and on that occasion several well-known professional singers had been engaged to contribute to the amusement of the company. But even they listened with hushed admira-

tion to Fenella's pure, sweet tones, as they floated, and swelled, and sunk in Mendelssohn's perfect ballad, 'The Maid of the Ganges,' and told each other that Lady Conroy's reputation as a vocalist had not been overrated, and that her proper place was on the concert platform or the operatic boards.

Some one amongst the guests, also, seemed powerfully attracted by the excellence of Fenella's singing. A gentleman who was keeping, whether by order or not, very close 'to heel' of a pretty little woman dressed in pink, had risen suddenly from his seat as Lady Conroy's voice first sounded on the air, and then as suddenly, with a face of crimson, had sat down again.

'Geoffrey!' said the little woman, turning her head over her shoulder to address him, 'I wish you'd ask Mrs Culleton the name of that lady who has just sung. Hasn't she got a lovely voice?'

'Yes! very nice,' replied the gentle-

man awkwardly; 'but I can't speak to Mrs Culleton now—she is surrounded by her friends! Don't you think it is time we were getting home, Jessie? It's nearly eleven o'clock.'

'Not at all! I don't mean to stir for the next hour! I want to hear that lady sing again. You might find out her name for me, Geoffrey. I wonder if she is Madame Nillson; I know *she* is tall and fair.'

'No! I don't think it's Nillson,' replied the gentleman, who looked very uncomfortable and as if he would like to run away. But his wife, sitting in front of him, could not observe the expression of his face.

A lady next to her having overheard their conversation, volunteered the desired information.

'That lady is not professional,' she whispered to the little woman in pink, 'but she is one of the finest amateur singers in London. She is Lady Conroy

—the wife of Sir Gilbert Conroy! Don't you think she is very beautiful? such a classical style of face and figure; and she is very young too—only twenty last birthday.'

'She looks rather sad,' said the little woman in pink.

'She does; but it can only be her expression, for she has everything that her heart could desire, and she is one of the most popular women in town. Her father, Captain Barrington, of the Royal Navy, was my late husband's most intimate friend; so, you see, I have known the family for a long time.'

'Yes, Lady Conroy must be a fortunate woman—mustn't she, Geoffrey?' said the pretty little lady in pink.

But the gentleman sitting at the back did not answer her; and she was soon too much absorbed in conversation with her new acquaintance to notice his silence.

He sat there, with his eyes fixed upon the ground, and the blood coursing about

his head and body in a most unpleasant manner. He was not quite sure of what he was thinking, nor why he felt so queer ; but he wished heartily that he could be transported back to his own residence, or that he had never entered the Culletons' drawing-room. He heard the conversation of the people round him like a confused and distant buzz in his ear; and then, to his horror, the voice of his hostess addressing him particularly by name.

'Captain Doyne, I have heard so much of your singing—might I ask you to oblige us with a song?'

He sprang to his feet, his face burning with confusion.

'I am very sorry, Mrs Culleton,' he stammered, 'but I—I really couldn't sing.'

His wife turned round sharply.

'Why, what is the matter, Geoffrey?' she said. 'You've brought your music with you.'

At that intelligence the hostess naturally redoubled her entreaties.

'That *was* good of you! Then I am sure you will allow me to persuade you, Captain Doyne. Tenor voices are so unfortunately rare; we cannot afford to miss the treat of hearing yours.'

But Captain Doyne was resolute.

'You must not think me disobliging,' he kept on reiterating, 'but it is impossible to me to sing to-night. Any other time, Mrs Culleton, I shall be most happy to do anything in my power for you.'

The lady, finding him implacable, expressed her regret and moved away; but his wife was very much annoyed at his refusal.

'What made you do it, Geoffrey?' she exclaimed. 'And when I had taken the trouble to bring your last new songs! And I wanted them to hear you so much. We have not had a gentleman's voice to equal yours to-night.'

But all Geoffrey Doyne answered was—

'It is impossible! I have no voice left;

I feel it,' and the little woman in pink appealed to her neighbour, if gentlemen were not very difficult to manage in such matters, and if it were not a shame, when one had a beautiful voice, to refuse to exercise it for the benefit of one's friends. Under cover of which confidence Geoffrey Doyne moved softly away from his position, and skirting the outside of the crowd that surrounded the piano, drew nearer the place where Fenella had once more stood up to sing.

He would not have met her face to face, nor have spoken to her, for the world—the very idea of such a thing would have made him turn tail and fly—but he thirsted to look upon her features again; he longed to see what difference the passing years had wrought upon them—whether they had left any traces of the affection she had once borne for him.

Four years! It was a long time in the life of either of them. It had brought him (as he imagined) contentment; what

had it brought to her? He watched her stand up before the listening crowd; he saw the ripened loveliness of her face and form; he listened to the rich tones that came from her lips—and in which he could trace (though faintly) a resemblance to the glad girlish notes that had once mingled with his own voice upon the sands of Inescedwyn; and he flushed from head to foot as he remembered that she had been his, and he had left her.

It was all past and gone now (so he said to himself); they were both married, and had half forgotten the folly that entranced them then; still he could not think of it without a burning shame, and an ardent curiosity to learn if she too had any feeling left respecting it.

To watch her at the present moment, one would have said that she had *not!* Fenella was singing a waltz of Arditi's—one of those running, bird-like things that sound so easy, and are so difficult; and the joyous *abandon* of the melody had com-

municated itself to her features, and lit them up with mirth and mischief. Her grey eyes sparkled, her cheeks flushed, her sweet lips were wreathed in a smile. There was no trace left of the tears she had wiped off her face as she stepped out of her carriage at the Culletons' door. How could those who surrounded her be expected to guess they had ever rested there?

'Naturally,' said Geoffrey Doyne to himself,' she has forgotten. A girl of sixteen is, after all, no more than a child, and feelings excited at that period are not likely to be lasting. What a good thing it was for both of us that the affair ended so easily! Had it been otherwise, there is no saying into what difficulties we might not have been led. There was a special Providence watching over me at that time.'

Yet he sighed rather heavily as he remembered Providence; and edged himself a little nearer to her in the crowd.

'How thankful I should be that she is married,' he thought; 'well and happily

married! What a load it would have been on my mind had she remained single! But as matters have turned out, there is nothing to regret.' By which he meant, that as matters had turned out so as to prove no inconvenience to himself, he could afford to say it was the will of God, and pose as a picture of resignation.

Whatever changes four years had wrought upon Fenella, they had not cured Geoffrey Doyne of the sickly sentimentalism he called Religion.

The song was now ended, and Lady Conroy was bowing and smiling on every side, in acknowledgment of the many pretty things that were being said to her; and Captain Doyne, in the excitement and pressure of the crowd, had been borne nearer to her than he had ever wished or intended to be. She advanced a step in order to leave the piano—some one had trodden on her train from behind; she turned suddenly to extricate it, and her eyes met those of Geoffrey Doyne! In a

moment every tinge of colour had deserted her cheeks. The light fled from her eyes, her mouth fell, her brow contracted. Her figure seemed to sway backwards and forwards. She had all the appearance of one who was about to fall. Everybody flew to her assistance.

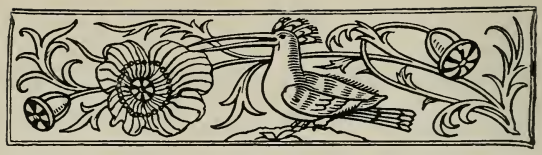
'Dear Lady Conroy, what is the matter? Are you ill? Do you feel faint? I am afraid you have over-exerted yourself,' came from the lips of Mrs Culleton and her daughters, as they pressed around her. And then Fenella remembered where she was, and that the eyes of the world were upon her. She drew herself up by a mighty effort, and smiled in a ghastly manner on her amiable tormentors.

'I think I *am* a little faint. The room is rather warm,' she said incoherently, and her hostess insisted upon one of the gentlemen conducting Lady Conroy to the supper-room and seeing her suitably supplied with refreshment.

But the minute she found herself free,

Fenella escaped to her carriage, and went home, with but one thought—one name —one face impressed upon her memory. She had not looked upon him a second time, but she knew that he had been there. She knew that Geoffrey Doyne and herself had stood face to face again once more.





CHAPTER II.

FAILURE.

'Successful love may sate itself away,
The wretched are the faithful; 'tis their fate
To have all feelings—save the one—decay.'
Byron.

BUT even when she found herself alone in her carriage, Lady Conroy did not weep. She shook from head to foot with excitement, and her face and hands burned as if with fever, but the emotions which the first sight of her recreant lover had called up in her breast were not such as find relief in tears. She had wept over him freely enough when she believed that they would never meet

again ; she had cried herself half blind for the loss of his love and his beauty and himself ; but now that she had seen him—that she realised he could be in the same town, the same room, and make no effort to renew their acquaintance — that his regard for her was so subdued that he could treat her like an ordinary stranger — (she, who had sacrificed her very life for him) — the chief feelings she experienced were shame and indignation and a resentful sense of wrong.

What was he—*who* was he, she asked herself passionately, that he should have *dared* to cast this infamy upon her father's daughter ; to choose *her* for the tool of his low gratification ; to lay a burden on *her* life and *her* soul that would never be lifted from them in this world again ?

She saw her position as the world saw it — the position of the honoured wife of Gilbert Conroy—and she knew

that she *might* have been so — that at one time she was fitted to be so, until *this* man crept into her affections, and under the guise of love (a love that stung to death) had made her as common as the commonest thing that crawls, and when he had done with her, flung her away, as we fling a flower, when its day has past, to perish on the dunghill.

As these thoughts coursed through her brain, and she coupled them with a remembrance of Geoffrey Doyne's fascinating beauty as it had flashed once more across her sight, Fenella felt as though she were going out of her mind. She rushed up into her own room, and, dismissing her attendant, locked the door, and let no eye see the despair to which she abandoned herself.

She had thought that she was growing strong — that she had cast out the unholy thrall that bound her to the husband of another woman — that she

had ceased to think of Geoffrey Doyne, except in the chastened manner that we think of the dead, who have purified themselves of all their mortal failings by laying down their mortal lives. But now she knew that she had been deceived. That one look had stirred up all the old remembrance, the old longing, the old regret, and Fenella recognised the truth that (however faithless and unworthy) Geoffrey Doyne was the same to her as he had ever been. *She* could not forget as he had done. Her love for him had been a true and holy love (whatever the world might say of it), and it would remain so to her dying day. He was false, and fickle, and untrue — she could not shut her eyes to that; but had he been twice as much so, she could not follow his example. That was her misfortune, said Fenella, groaning to herself — that she was not strong enough to root out his image from her heart. She knew that he be-

longed to another woman now, but he had been hers *first* — (even in her despair she could not help a little womanly thrill of pride running through her as she recalled the fact)—he had been hers *first*, and he was the father of her child! At the remembrance of Valeria, a new idea seemed to strike Fenella. She had flung herself across the bed, and hidden her blistered face upon her outstretched arms, but now she suddenly raised herself and stood upright. The father of her child! Yes; *and he did not know it!*

Eliza Bennett had given her a fanciful account of the short interview she had held with Geoffrey Doyne at Ines-cedwyn, when she had told him the same falsehood that Mrs Barrington had forced upon her daughter, namely, that the child was dead. The nurse, who considered it wise that Fenella should think the very worst of the man that had betrayed her, had related the occurrence as something very different from what had really taken place, even

going so far as to assert that Mr Doyne had replied it was a very good thing the child *was* dead, which (whatever he might have felt) he certainly never recorded. And the idea that had flashed through Fenella's brain was that she would tell him that Valeria lived. He had a right to know it (so she argued with herself), and she had a right to tell him ; and if it made his life less easy, or placed difficulties in his path, had it not done the same with her own ? Why was all the retribution to fall on her head ? The thought of his wife did not trouble her ; few women would be so generous as to permit a wife to stand in the way when a man has injured themselves. Besides (as she said, with a curled lip), his wife, whoever she might be, had nothing to do with this ; it concerned their two selves only. Valeria was their child, and that was a tie with which no one else in the world had the right to interfere.

Lady Conroy argued this matter in her

own mind until she had made it appear not only reasonable, but just; but in reality there was a large spice of revenge in it—a strong desire to make Geoffrey Doyne realise the extent of his crime, and feel that, far from its being buried in comfortable oblivion, there was a living witness to testify to his infidelity. It may have been a wrong feeling, but it was a very natural one. Fenella had suffered almost every moment since he had deserted her, and he had taken the world (to all appearance) none the less easily because of her anguish and her shame. *She* must journey to the end of life bowed down by a sorrowful secret of which she dared not rid herself, whilst *he* was to carry his head gallantly through the world, without a speck or smirch upon his armour. No! if he could not bear it, he should share it. He should know that she had some heart left for him and for his child, whether his own were adamant or not.

Was there any other secret hope lurking in Lady Conroy's breast as she decided on her line of action—any thought of waking up again the passion that had caused her ruin, and letting Geoffrey Doyne feel in his turn what it was to be left to pine after the unattainable? If there were, she did not acknowledge it—she did not even recognise its existence. If she thought there was any lingering affection for her in his bosom, it was with the idea that he might help her out of her difficulty with Sir Gilbert Conroy. *How*, she could not say, and dared not think. Everything connected with Valeria seemed to be so entangled by impossibilities; but still, if Geoffrey cherished any recollection of their former attachment, if his heart were at all softened by the knowledge that she was the mother of his living child, he might be inclined to help her with his counsel and advice (perhaps even to receive Valeria if Sir Gilbert insisted on a separation between them);

at all events, to comfort and strengthen her resolution if they decided the secret must still be preserved.

The more Fenella considered the matter, the more she became convinced that, whatever might be the issue, Geoffrey Doyne should be informed of the existence of his child; and she cast about in her mind for the best means of procuring an interview with him.

She was thankful that Bennett was away in Scotland—Bennett, who read her face like a book, and would assuredly have guessed that her sudden emotion was due to something connected with '*that there nasty locket*,' as she irreverently termed the trinket that still occupied its old place next Fenella's heart. But she would have given anything to have had her child with her—*his* child to fondle and to weep over! She felt as if she must rush down to Conroy Castle, if it were only for an hour, that she might assure her fatherless baby of her undying

love and devotion; that she might tell the unconscious infant that *his* untruth should only make her be the more true and faithful to the sacred charge he had left behind him. But she knew this was impossible, and she must be content to see him only, and to tell him of their mutual responsibility.

She lay awake half the night, planning all sorts of means for seeing Geoffrey Doyne without the knowledge of his wife —none of which were feasible to be put into execution by a lady whose husband forbid her walking the length of the street without attendance.

Our hearts may be breaking for the want of one kind word—our lives may be wrecked by the delay of an hour—our whole future spoilt for lack of an explanation; and yet whilst we live in this world, so stringent are its rules, so tight the cords decorum draws round us, that we dare not move an inch out of the prescribed line along which society

orders us to walk, even to save our own lives. And Lady Conroy was so much hedged in by the barriers which custom raises against expediency, that she saw no farther ahead of her than the rest of her peers. The ordinary way of procedure was, after all, the only way to adopt—and .the ordinary way was to call upon Mrs Geoffrey Doyne.

Fenella felt all her pride rise in revolt at the idea ; however, of course the lady knew nothing about her, and there was a stronger motive than even pride urging her on to take the initiative. With this end in view, therefore, she ordered her carriage directly after luncheon on the following day, and drove to the Culletons. It was easy to explain her call on the score of wishing to make an apology for her unexpected departure the evening before.

'I was so sorry to run away,' she said, 'but I got a sudden attack of pain, Mrs Culleton, and I am afraid, had I remained,

I should not have been any further use to you.'

'Oh, my dear Lady Conroy, pray don't speak of it. I am sure you were most obliging, and our friends were delighted? What sort of pain was it? Neuralgia? Heated rooms are so very apt to bring it on. One gets a chill, you know, and then the mischief's done.'

'Yes, I am subject to neuralgia,' replied Fenella, with an evident desire to change the subject. 'What capital music you had last night! How charmingly Miss Annie Baring sings!'

'Yes; very sweetly, indeed! But her voice is nothing to yours, Lady Conroy. Some of our friends last night were positively raving about it. There was a Captain Doyne here who seemed quite entranced. He couldn't take his eyes off you.'

'Ah! Captain Doyne,' repeated Fenella, with a sudden flush; 'I was just going to speak to you about him, Mrs Culleton. Is he not married?'

'Yes; he has been married for some years to a most charming young woman (one of Dr Robertson's daughters), and they have just returned from India. I fancy she is not very strong. She looks delicate. Do you know them, Lady Conroy?'

'I do not know Mrs Doyne, but I knew him very well—many years ago; in fact, he is one of my oldest friends,' replied Fenella hesitatingly.

'So funny to hear you talking of "*many years ago*,"—dear Lady Conroy—at your age,' simpered Mrs Culleton. 'But Captain Doyne is a splendid-looking young man, is he not? and so improved since he was last in England.!'

'I don't know—I didn't speak to him,' stammered Fenella. 'I only passed him in the crowd as I was going away. Had I seen him earlier, I should have asked you to introduce Mrs Doyne to me; and I thought—I was about to say—perhaps it would only be polite—if you would call with me on her some day,

Mrs Culleton, and let me make her acquaintance.'

Mrs Culleton was delighted at the idea of driving about town with Lady Conroy under her wing.

'My dear Lady Conroy, of course! I shall be only too pleased, and I am sure Mrs Doyne will esteem your visit a great honour; because, after all, she is *nobody* you see; whatever she may be, she owes to him (*he* comes of a good old Buckinghamshire family), and she may well consider herself flattered by the notice of Sir Gilbert Conroy's wife.'

'Oh, I wasn't thinking of that,' replied her visitor; 'but as I knew *him*, and it would be a little attention, I thought at any rate there could be no harm in my going with you to see her some day.'

'Are you at liberty this afternoon, dear Lady Conroy? Shall we go there at once? I owe Mrs Doyne a call, and am quite at your service, if it should be agreeable to you to accompany me.'

'I have no other engagement,' replied Fenella, colouring like a peony at the prospect of meeting Geoffrey Doyne again. Would he be at home? Was it possible that she should see him—that they should stand in the same room together and speak face to face?

Now that the interview for which she had manœuvred seemed close at hand, she felt as if she could not go through with it—as if she must run a dozen miles the other way. But Mrs Culleton gave her no opportunity of escape. She appeared in the drawing-room, ready dressed for the expedition, in an incredibly short space of time, and there was nothing to be done but re-enter the carriage and order the coachman to drive to the given address.

The Geoffrey Doynes had not long returned from India (so Mrs Culleton informed her visitor as they drove along), and were occupying furnished apartments in Half-Moon Street.

'Very handsome rooms, Lady Conroy,' explained Mrs Culleton, 'and everything in the best style; and I suppose, as they are alone, they hardly thought it worth their while to engage a house for the season. They have no children.'

'No children!' repeated Lady Conroy.

'Ah! I suppose you can't understand that, with your beautiful baby!' laughed Mrs Culleton; 'but *she* is delicate, you know, and they have only been married three years.'

'Four!' said Fenella quickly.

'*Four*, is it? Dear me! you know more about them than I do. At all events, as yet there are no little Doynes.'

Fenella said nothing, but her hand went up with a quick gesture of satisfaction to press the locket that lay concealed in the bosom of her dress. What woman, born of woman, could have resisted a feeling of pleasure at such a piece of intelligence? In another minute the carriage stopped at the door in Half-Moon

Street, and Mrs Geoffrey Doyne was announced to be at home. Lady Conroy followed her friend up the staircase, with shaking knees and a white face. But she need not have concerned herself. The lady they had come to see was quite alone. Jessie was more than honoured by the advent of her visitors. She was considerably flustered, and particularly when she found that one of them was no other than Lady Conroy, whose singing she had admired so much the night before. She was not much used to society; and in her pleasure and surprise, and anxiety to please, she stammered and coloured, and looked so awkward, that Fenella regained her self-possession, and regarded her with calm surprise, wondering what Geoffrey could have seen in her superior to herself. Jessie had been rather pretty and *piquante*, but India had sharpened her features and spoiled her complexion, and there was a metallic ring in her voice which

grated unpleasantly on ears that were not accustomed to it. She was already losing, in fact, her *beauté du cochon*, and developing the worst traits she had inherited from her mother, amongst which may be reckoned a most jealous and unreasonable temper. But at that moment Mrs Doyne was to be seen at her best, and she was really most anxious to make a favourable impression on her new acquaintance.

The conversation soon turned on the absent master of the house, for Jessie was very fond and very proud of her husband, and lamented every lost opportunity of showing him off in public.

'I am *so* sorry that Captain Doyne is out, she commenced to Mrs Culleton, 'and I don't know where he's gone either. To his club, I suppose. Gentlemen seem to pass all their time at their clubs. But perhaps he will come in again before you go away.'

'I hope he may; I should like to have an opportunity of speaking to Captain

Doyne. I want to scold him for not singing for us last night.'

'Yes! wasn't it tiresome of him? and he has such a splendid voice too! But Geoffrey was not at all well yesterday. He seemed to have quite a sudden attack whilst he was at your house, Mrs Culleton, and he hurried me home long before I was ready to go. I enjoyed the music so much!'

'How *very* strange!' ejaculated Mrs Culleton; 'Lady Conroy, here, was taken ill exactly in the same manner, and had to run away before the evening was concluded. It could hardly be infectious though, as she and Captain Doyne did not speak to one another,' she concluded, with a laugh.

'But you don't know my husband, do you?' said Mrs Doyne, as she turned to Lady Conroy.

Fenella felt that her cheeks were flaming.

'Yes!—that is—I did—a long time ago,' she replied, in broken sentences.

Mrs Culleton came to the rescue.

'Dear me, yes! Mrs Doyne. It seems that Lady Conroy and your husband are very old friends (the oldest friend she has, she says), and that is the reason she was desirous of making your acquaintance.'

'How odd that Geoffrey didn't say so last night,' cried Mrs Doyne, with open eyes.

'But I didn't speak to him,' stammered Fenella; 'I did not even see him, till just as I was coming away.'

'But he saw *you*, Lady Conroy, for we were sitting together when you first stood up to sing, and wondering who you were, and Geoffrey would have asked Mrs Culleton, only she was so occupied. Are you *sure* you are not mistaken? that it may not be some one of the same name with whom you were formerly acquainted?'

'No! I am not mistaken,' replied Fenella, with a sickening qualm at her heart. 'Captain Doyne may have forgotten *me*—(that is very likely)—but I

am quite sure that he is the same person that I knew years ago.'

'*Where* did you know him?' demanded Jessie curiously.

'Oh, what does it matter. Far away from here—in the country,' said Lady Conroy, but in so uneasy a manner that it attracted her hostess's attention.

'She has come to call on me, for *his* sake, and not for mine,' she thought, with jealous intuition; '*I* don't owe her any thanks for her visit,' and thereupon she turned her attention to Mrs Culleton, and almost ignored the presence of Fenella. But her visitor hardly noticed the incivility. Her eyes kept roving round the room for some evidence of Geoffrey's presence, and she was alarmed to find how her heart throbbed as they lighted on a pair of gloves and an allumette case that were carelessly left upon the mantelpiece. A coloured photograph, too, of him, that stood on a velvet table close at hand, riveted her attention, and Jessie noticed the attraction.

'Do you recognise that portrait, Lady Conroy?' she said unpleasantly. 'Is it that of your friend whom you knew in—in the country?'

'Of course I recognise it,' replied Fenella, in a cold, proud voice; 'have I not already told you that I know Captain Doyne?'

The women were already on the defensive. They had guessed each other's thoughts—each one was ready to resent what the other might say.

'I am doubly vexed,' continued Jessie sweetly, to Mrs Culleton, 'that my husband should be out, now that I find that he and Lady Conroy are such intimate friends, and I am sure he will be dreadfully annoyed about it himself. He will be so curious to know *where* they can have met, for I am sure he did not recognise her yesterday.'

Fenella understood the innuendo, and determined to brave it out.

'Refresh his memory by telling him

that I was Fenella Barrington, Mrs Doyne, and that we met at Ines-cedwyn,' she said, with a hard laugh.

At the mention of Ines-cedwyn, Jessie looked uneasy. It was from Lynwern, a town close to Ines-cedwyn, that Geoffrey had written to break off their engagement, and more than once the name of the little village had escaped his lips.

'Indeed!' she said, in a pert voice, and with a heightened colour. 'I remember Captain Doyne was staying close by Ines-cedwyn with his family just before our marriage, but I never heard him mention your name.'

'Very likely not!' said Lady Conroy quietly. 'Perhaps he had pleasanter things to think of when he met you again. Have you been long home from India, Mrs Doyne?'

'No; only two months, and I don't think we shall remain for the full term of my husband's leave. He doesn't care for England. He told me the other day

that it would be hardly worth our while making any new acquaintances whilst here, and he had no old ones whom he cared for sufficiently to go out of his way to renew.'

'But I am sure Captain Doyne will be charmed to see Lady Conroy again,' interposed Mrs Culleton, who saw that something was wrong between the ladies, and wanted to set it right. 'I only wonder he did not speak to her yesterday evening, for he was standing close by during her last song. I could see his head towering above that of everybody else.'

'I cannot understand it at all,' cried Mrs Doyne, 'and I shall quiz Geoffrey finely about it as soon as he comes home.'

Fenella felt as if she could not stand her incredulous and uncivil manner any longer.

'Is this a portrait of your child?' she asked, with a dash of feminine spite, as she took up the photograph of a little boy from the table.

Jessie had to lower her crest.

'No!' she answered hurriedly; 'I have no children.'

'Oh! you should see Lady Conroy's baby!' exclaimed Mrs Culleton, with ill-timed zeal; 'the most beautiful, engaging creature you ever saw of her age! Lady Conroy! do show Mrs Doyne the portrait you wear of your sweet little Valeria. She is a perfect cherub, and talks nearly as well as her mamma.'

But Fenella held her baby's picture jealously in her hand.

'Babies interest no one but their owners,' she replied.

'Oh! pray let me see it,' urged Mrs Doyne, with an air of would-be indifference. 'I admire children greatly, although (with Captain Doyne) I have no desire to have any of my own.'

'Does not Captain Doyne wish for children?' said Fenella, looking up quickly. 'How strange! I thought all men did that!'

She had been about to say '*all men*

who love their wives,' but fortunately stopped herself in time.

Jessie saw that she had said too much.

'He would wish for them if *I* did,' she retorted; 'but I don't. I love my husband devotedly, and he is all sufficient for my happiness.'

'Many women do that, who find room to love their children into the bargain,' said Lady Conroy; 'and, at all events, I wouldn't part with mine.'

'I should think not, indeed! the loveliest little creature in the world!' murmured Mrs Culleton.

Jessie almost snatched the locket, which hung with several other pendants on her watch-chain, from Fenella's hand. She turned it round, and caught a glimpse of Valeria's sweet little face, with its brown curls and blue eyes and smiling mouth, and felt an insane jealousy of Valeria's mother. Jessie was not as indifferent to the lack of children as she professed to be, and she had a task to keep back the

angry tears that rose to her eyes. *She* might have been the possessor, she thought, of just such a child, and Geoffrey might have loved her all the better for it. She could almost fancy the little face resembled Geoffrey's. There were the same coloured eyes and hair, and the trick of the drooping mouth. She shut the locket with a snap, and let it fall against the other trinkets.

'*Very* pretty,' she said patronisingly, 'as babies go—very pretty indeed. And *that* is a pretty ornament, though rather curious,' she continued, as she touched another of the pendants. 'What is it, Lady Conroy?'

Fenella glanced downwards. Mrs Doyne held in her hand the blue enamel and gold sleeve-link that had fallen from Geoffrey's cuff in the very moment of their parting, and which she had always carried on her watch-chain since. The sight filled her with dismay.

'*That—that*—Mrs Doyne?' she stam-

mered. 'Oh, that is only a sleeve-link—a thing of no consequence,' and she drew it beneath her mantle as she spoke. But Jessie had eyes sharp as a needle, and Lady Conroy's *ruse* did not deceive her, although she professed to fall in with it.

'A funny keepsake,' she said, 'but it looks pretty amongst the other things,' and then Fenella rose, and told Mrs Culleton that they had already outstayed their time.

Mrs Doyne was profuse in her thanks to the latter lady for having come to see her, and in her hopes that they should soon meet again, but to Lady Conroy she offered nothing but a polite good-bye. As soon as they were in the carriage Mrs Culleton animadverted on her behaviour.

'My dear Lady Conroy, you and Mrs Doyne did not appear to get on at all together. What was the matter with her to-day, I wonder! I never saw her so snappish and unpleasant before. It's a pity the Captain was not in. He would have smoothed matters between you.'

'I don't know that I should much care to have them smoothed,' replied Fenella carelessly. 'I thought, from my former acquaintance with Captain Doyne, that his wife would have been a refined and educated woman, but she is both ill-bred and ill-tempered, and I am sorry I called upon her.'

'Oh, don't say that—because, perhaps, it is only her manner, and Captain Doyne is such a perfect gentleman, it would be a thousand pities to exclude him from our visiting list. You must come and meet him again at our house, Lady Conroy, and hear him sing—and then, I know, you will be charmed with him.'

'Yes, he used to sing well,' said Fenella, and then she seemed weary of the subject and changed it. And as soon as it was possible, she dropped Mrs Culleton and drove back to her own home.

So far as making friends with Geoffrey's wife was concerned, her visit had proved

a failure. She acknowledged that, but at the same time she was not at all sure if (under any circumstances) it would have been possible, desirable, or honourable for her to have made friends with Mrs Doyne. Such friendships are attempted sometimes, and with praiseworthy intentions, but they never succeed. The intuitive faculties in women are very keen, and where two of them love (or have loved) the same man, they are certain (sooner or later) to discover the truth, and suspect each other's motives.

The real object with which Fenella had paid that visit — to see and speak with Geoffrey Doyne — had failed also. She was not one whit nearer to him than she had been before, nor he to sharing the secret that possessed her whole heart. And that was what Lady Conroy felt more and more convinced that he must and should do. It was wrong and unnatural that she should bear the burden by herself, and the time might come

when he would be the first to tell her so. For, whatever he might be in the present, nothing could undo the past, in which he had been entirely her own. And if that past had left its traces upon their lives, was it likely that Geoffrey would shrink from bearing his share of the consequences? Fenella could not believe it. He had been weak and fickle in his relations with her, but he was not —he *could* not be dishonourable. So, after much cogitation, she sat down and wrote him the following note — a note which might have fallen into the hands of his wife without compromising either of them :—

'My dear Captain Doyne,—It is some time since we met, but I scarcely think you can have forgotten me. I should like to see you again, and I have something of yours that I wish to deliver into your own hands. Will you call upon me to-morrow afternoon, at any time after three?—Yours truly, Fenella Conroy.'

And having despatched her letter so as it might reach him by the evening post, she awaited the issue with as much patience as she found it possible to maintain.



CHAPTER III.

NEMESIS.

'Many an one amongst us could undo the evil he has done, if only he would not push away the pain it causes him.'—*Ariadne.*

GEOFFREY DOYNE had been spending the day wandering about London in the most uncomfortable manner. He had not been able to rest anywhere. He had walked in and out of his club half-a-dozen times, and sauntered about the park, and dropped in at Blanchard's, and kept incessantly on his feet, and been utterly miserable. For the sight of Lady Conroy the night before had affected him powerfully, and in more

ways than one. He had been seized with an uncontrollable regret for the loss of her, and an overwhelming disappointment in the conviction that, for three years at least, he had been deceiving himself in the grossest manner.

When this young man was first introduced on the scene, he was described as being of a very emotional, susceptible, and easily-influenced temperament. It was this peculiarity of his character that made him alternately the slave of whichever passion came uppermost; that rendered him capable of talking of religion and making illicit love in the same breath, and believing that the two feelings could harmonise,—which would lead him, in fact, to pose as a martyr in some cause or other to the day of his death. He had sincerely and truly loved Fenella Barrington, and he never knew *how* truly and sincerely until his own act had parted them for ever. Having weakly conceded to what his friends considered *right* and his own

conscience plainly told him was *wrong*, in the matter of renewing his engagement with Jessie Robertson, he had not had the strength of mind to break the news of his infidelity to the girl he had so deeply injured, but left her to find it out from the public press. He was in the position of a man who can be cruel enough to administer the cup of poison that he knows will kill, yet has not the courage to watch the struggles of his victim. So he left Fenella's heart to break alone.

It is true that he was not aware of the extent of the wrong he had done her; and for a while he calmed his uneasy conscience by trying to persuade himself she was so young, she would be sure to forget, and Jessie would have suffered as much in her way at his desertion as Fenella. But after he had met Eliza Bennett at Ines-cedwyn, and heard the whole truth, Geoffrey Doyne could no longer lay that flattering unction to his soul. He knew then that he had de-

stroyed Fenella's life as surely as if he had trampled it under his feet; that he had done *that* that no tears of penitence, no sackcloth nor ashes — nothing could undo, and nothing atone for, except *the one* thing which he had put it out of his power to offer in atonement—marriage! The shock of the first discovery nearly crushed him, and he would have given his life at that time (had it been possible) to restore her reputation and her purity. But it was no use thinking of it; the deed was done—the injury was irreparable. A plea for forgiveness even would but seem like further insult. He brooded over the thought night and day. The caresses of his wife became more and more distasteful to him; he grew morbidly miserable and self-condemnatory.

In this state of mind there was but one way in which the pendulum could swing for Geoffrey Doyne. Instead of taking up the burden he had brought upon himself manfully, and looking on

every side to see how he could possibly alleviate the misery he had caused, he took refuge in the poetical dreamy hopes and fears he called Religion, and tried to expiate his crime, not by helping others, but by debasing himself.

Prayer he believed to be the only means by which he could purify and save his soul; so he left everybody else's soul to look after itself, and spent his time in entreating the Creator to see that no bad consequences happened to his own. It is a common fashion of trying to atone for one's sins in this world, but it is an intensely selfish one. What such people want is, not immunity from suffering for others, but ease for their own guilty conscience. They want to feel satisfied they will not have to bear the penalty of what they have done; and it is soothing to think it will all be washed away by merely asking for it, without lifting a hand to move the weight oneself. Surely if, having committed a wrong, we coura-

geously tried to remedy it—without any consideration for our pride, our position in the world, or ourselves—we might safely leave the Judge of all men to see that we did not bear a larger share of the punishment than we deserve.

But Geoffrey Doyne, having, as he believed, purified his soul from all love for Fenella Barrington, was sorely taken aback by the sensations the sight of her at Mrs Culleton's engendered in him, and which could scarcely have been more unsubdued and earthly had he never prayed in his life. Strange to say, too, the fact of her being a married woman—the wife of a man in a better social position and more affluent circumstances than his own—seemed to annoy, rather than soothe him. There is so little difference, after all, between one human creature and another where the *heart* is concerned.

And Geoffrey Doyne was fain to acknowledge now—as, indeed (unconsciously

to himself), he had acknowledged all along—that Fenella was the only woman he had ever really loved. She was his *grande passion.* She had become so from the moment they met; she would remain so to the moment they parted. He might never see nor speak to her again, but no other woman would ever fill her vacant place. It was a mortifying conclusion for him to arrive at. It upset all his theories; it made his religion look the flimsy reed it really was.

Geoffrey Doyne had but one way out of the difficulty. He persuaded himself that the feelings he experienced were a temptation of the devil—a temptation it was his duty to fight against, and flee from, never mind *whom* he trampled over in the way. So his vagaries on the day on which Lady Conroy paid her visit to his wife meant simply that he was trying to run away from his own reproachful thoughts. He had been brought into contact again with the woman he had so

bitterly wronged, and his manhood told him that, whatever might be her position, his part was to try and seek her forgiveness for his past cruelty, and to assure her (if she would accept an assurance) of his friendship and fidelity in the future. But his self-created deity — a deity of vengeance, terror, and expiation —called out on the other side that, having done her the greatest injury a man can do a woman—not by having *loved* her, but by having *left* her—his duty was to avoid even the sight of her thenceforward, lest a kind look or word should have the power to mitigate the pain they mutually endured.

At least Geoffrey Doyne deceived himself into believing it was the voice of his deity that he heard. Had he listened with less self-satisfied ears, he might have detected that it was only the whisper of his own guilty conscience which made him too great a coward to meet her again. All the same, his religion was not strong

enough to make him stay at home and bear his wife company.

Jessie bored him ; her intellectual qualities were not such as to render her a companion for him ; and he had long ceased to offer her the attentions of a lover. And to-day of all days, she would have worried him into an irritable state of temper, which he was not slow at any time to express. He would have been glad of an excuse to stay out all the evening as well, but he had none ; so dinner-time found him once more in Half-Moon Street. He had hardly stretched his comely limbs upon one of the lounges in the drawing-room before his wife came full tilt at him with her intelligence.

'Who do you think has been here this afternoon, Geoffrey ?'

'How can I tell ? You know I hate guessing.'

'I don't believe you'd guess this if you tried till doomsday—but, perhaps, it was a concerted plan between you, after

all. Mrs Culleton called with your *great* friend Lady Conroy.'

Geoffrey Doyne was too much taken by surprise to notice the emphasis. He raised himself on the couch and regarded his wife full in the face.

'*Who* did you say?' he asked, in a low voice.

'Lady Conroy! Oh, don't pretend not to know her, Geoffrey, because she says you are one of her oldest friends. And her name was Fenella Barrington, and you met her at Ines-cedwyn. *Now* do you remember?'

Did he remember? There was not much need to ask the question. Jessie kept her eyes well fixed on him the whole time she was speaking, and saw the colour fade from his face as if he had received a sudden blow.

'What—what made her call on you?' he stammered.

'Why shouldn't she? Ain't I good enough for your friends to call on?

Though I don't suppose she came for *me* at all! and I am sure I should never like *her!* A cold, proud, stuck-up thing! I was quite glad when she went away again. *Did* you know her at Inescedwyn?'

'Yes! yes!—slightly! I never stayed there, you know! My sisters and I were at Lynwern.—Isn't it past dinner-time?'

'I ordered it half-an-hour later this evening. If you won't tell me any of your plans, Geoffrey, you can't expect to have your meals regularly. But about Lady Conroy! How long has she been married?'

'I don't know!—I don't know anything about her.'

'That is very odd, considering she knows so much about you.'

'What did she say of me?' demanded Geoffrey quickly.

'Nothing in particular; but I saw she knew! Why didn't you say last night that she was a friend of yours?'

'She is not a friend! It is years since I saw her — four years,' he added, with a sigh.

'Why should you sigh in that absurd manner, then? And why didn't you tell me her name when she stood up to sing last night?'

'I didn't know her name. I had not even heard that she was married until the lady sitting next to you informed you of it.'

'But you never said that you had seen her before. You looked at her as if she had been a perfect stranger,' continued Jessie suspiciously.

'As I was sitting behind you, I am not aware how you can have seen what I looked like,' he replied, as he lay back on the sofa.

But his wife was not satisfied.

'You're only saying that to cheat me. I know there is some mystery about it,' she said discontentedly.

Geoffrey closed his eyes, and answered

nothing. He had two reasons for wishing to discontinue the conversation. He was still suffering acutely from the shock of meeting Fenella, and of hearing she had been to their house; and he was very much afraid of exciting the jealousy of Jessie's disposition.

'Try and find something else to talk of,' he murmured languidly. 'The sayings and doings of Lady Conroy don't interest me.'

His wife changed the subject, but his manner did not deceive her. She was very cunning, if she was not clever, and he had over-acted his part. But she said no more until they descended to the dinner-table.

As they sat there together, the evening post arrived, and Fenella's note was put into Captain Doyne's hand. As he opened it and his eye fell on the unforgotten writing, his face flushed with annoyance, and the hand that held the paper trembled. He tried to cover his

agitation by pulling his moustaches whilst he read the few words it contained again and again, whilst his wife watched his every action, as a cat watches a mouse.

'Who is that letter from, Geoffrey?' she asked him presently.

'No one — I mean, it is nothing,' he answered, as he crushed the paper together and thrust it in his pocket. 'May I help you to another cutlet, Jessie?'

But Jessie had lost her taste for cutlets. The reticence which her husband observed was the worst course he could have pursued towards her. He had roused her suspicions, and Mrs Doyne's suspicions once roused never slept again until they were satisfied one way or another. She returned to the attack as soon as the dessert was put upon the table.

'You have not read your letter yet, Geoffrey,' she said.

'Thank you. I have seen as much of it as I wish to do.'

'Is it on business? Was it from Maple, about the furniture for India?'

'No; I saw Maple to-day, and settled everything that was necessary by word of mouth.'

'You are terribly mysterious, Geoffrey. I hope it is not from mamma. Nothing is wrong at home, is there?'

'Pray don't alarm yourself. Your mother would be sure to address any news of importance to you. When has she ever honoured me with her correspondence?'

'Well, there's no one else to write to you that I can think of. You heard from Ryelands this morning; besides, that is a London letter. You are awfully close about it, Geoffrey.'

'And you are awfully inquisitive, so let us say no more on the subject. It is hard lines if a man cannot keep a letter to himself occasionally after four years of married life.'

'I never keep any secrets from *you*,' pouted Jessie.

'You are quite welcome to do so if you choose,' retorted her husband, who was tired of the discussion, and nervous as to its possible issue.

When dinner was over he retired to his own room, and, taking Fenella's letter from his pocket, tried to decide what he had better do regarding it. Should he go and see her? He knew that he longed to look into her face, to hear her voice, to touch her hand again in friendship, but he was afraid to do it. What could she want with him—what had she of his that she wished to return? Would she make a scene—would she weep and reproach him for the past, or try to renew their old intimacy? And on what footing would that place him with Jessie? How would her jealous disposition stand his being even on kindly terms with any other woman? He trembled when he thought of the perplexity into which the letter had thrown him. Yet, even as he thought so, he pressed it softly to his

lips, and lost himself in a dream of the flower-bestrewn landslip, and the golden sands of Ines-cedwyn, until he seemed to feel a cool hand laid in his, and to meet the upward gaze of those earnest, loving eyes. With the remembrance came a quick sob, almost a cry of regret.

As he uttered it, his wife stole in from the adjoining chamber.

He had only time to put down the letter on the table before she stood beside him.

'What is the matter, Geoffrey'? she inquired, as her eyes travelled rapidly to the paper; 'has anything in that letter disturbed you? Why, it's from Lady Conroy!'

'Disturbed me? Nonsense! How could it?' he replied awkwardly, attempting to cover his confusion. 'From Lady Conroy, did you say? Yes, it is.'

'What can she have to write to you about?' demanded Jessie, all her former suspicions aroused with double force.

'It's only an invitation. I was just about to answer it.'

'*An invitation!* — for both of us, of course. But why does she send it to *you?*'

'No; it's not a regular invitation. Lady Conroy wishes to speak to me on business, and has written to ask me to look in to-morrow afternoon—that is all.'

'*On business!* Oh, Geoffrey, I don't believe it! What business can she possibly have with you? I am sure there is something wrong about all this. I felt it the moment she entered the room this afternoon.'

'Jessie! don't you presume to speak to me in such terms of myself, or any of my friends! What do you mean by *something wrong?* Am I not to see an old acquaintance on business, without having a false accusation brought against me like that?'

'Oh, rubbish! *Business!* It isn't business at all, or you would have gone up and spoken to her last night. Besides, why have you never mentioned her name

to me before? You said this evening she was *not* a friend of yours, and now you say she is an old friend! What am I to believe when you contradict yourself in that manner?'

'I don't care what you believe or don't believe,' said Captain Doyne rudely.

'And are you going to see this—this—person, then?'

'I intend to call upon Lady Conroy, if you allude to her.'

'Without *me?*'

'You are not asked. You will return Lady Conroy's call, I suppose, in due course, but to-morrow she wishes to see me alone—at least that is what I understand from her note. You had better read it,' he added, as he handed it to her, 'and then you will be satisfied it is not the terrible communication you seem to imagine.'

'Thank you! I don't wish to see it,' replied Jessie, who had read every word over his shoulder. 'You don't suppose

I'm so silly as to believe Lady Conroy would put anything she didn't wish me to read in a letter. Artful creatures like her never do. She will wait to tell you her real sentiments till she sees you. But if you go without *me*, I shall say it is disgraceful.'

Jessie was fidgeting all the time she spoke with a little box of jewellery that stood on her husband's dressing-table, turning over the shirt studs and waistcoat buttons as if she were arranging them. Presently she pounced upon a single sleeve-link made of blue enamel and twisted gold.

'I *knew* I was right,' she exclaimed triumphantly, as she held it up before him. 'Where is the fellow to this sleeve-link, Geoffrey?'

'I am sure I don't know,' he answered carelessly; 'I believe I lost it ages and ages ago.'

'Then *I* can tell you where it is—on Lady Conroy's watch-chain.'

'It is not true,' cried her husband, with darkening brows.

'It *is* true, Geoffrey. She put her bunch of seals and lockets into my hand this afternoon, that I might see her child's portrait, and I saw your sleeve-link amongst them, and noticed it to her. Oh, how you have deceived me!' cried Jessie, flinging up her arms and bursting into tears; 'and when I have loved you so!'

Geoffrey was moved by her appeal. It was true that she had loved him—much too much for his comfort; but she had been a good wife, and he could not bear to see her in distress. He left his seat and put his arms round her.

'Jessie, my dear, I have not deceived you. If Lady Conroy has my sleeve-link, she must have gained possession of it long before our marriage, for I have never seen her since.'

'Then—then—she is the girl—whom you cared for—more than—you cared—for me,' sobbed Jessie.

Geoffrey was aghast. He had not been prepared for so rapid a conclusion on her part. He did not know what to say.

'Tell me—is it true?' demanded his wife. 'Is Lady Conroy the girl for whose sake you broke off our engagement? Geoffrey, I must know!'

'I am very sorry you asked me the question, Jessie, but I cannot tell you a falsehood on the subject. The lady of whom you speak was Lady Conroy. But that is a long time ago, you know, and she is married since; and, therefore, I sincerely trust you will never allude to the subject again.'

'But she wears your sleeve-link, and she writes to you to go and see her—all alone too—and you want to go; and it looks very suspicious to me, and underhand. And what did she come calling on me for, except to get hold of you again? Oh, Geoffrey, I never thought you would have treated me in this manner!'

'I have not treated you in any manner

that you need complain of, Jessie. I had not even made up my mind if I would see Lady Conroy. But as you object to it, I will not. I will write and tell her it is better we should not meet except in public.'

'And then she will imagine you are still in love with her,' pouted Mrs Doyne, 'or that I am jealous and won't let you go.'

'What am I to say, then? If I plead a previous engagement, she may fix another day?'

'Don't answer her letter at all. Then she will understand that you don't wish to meet her.'

'I can't do so ungentlemanly a thing,' said Geoffrey Doyne.

'If you write to her, I know you will go,' cried his wife. 'She will write back again, and insist upon seeing you.'

'If she did, there would be no great harm done,' he answered.

'I think there would be *every* harm done!' exclaimed Jessie impetuously.

'And how do you think *I* should feel sitting at home alone, and knowing you were with *her*—the very girl who was wicked enough to make you break off our engagement, and whom you told me you loved much better than you did me? Oh! it was cruel and wicked of you both. I have had no happiness in my married life for thinking of it, and now, just—just—as I thought we were going to have a little peace and pleasure—in the London season, she comes again to upset it all, and to make you go and see her, with—with—without *me!*' And Mrs Doyne went off in a series of gasps, that looked terribly like an impending storm of hysterics.

'There — there!' exclaimed Geoffrey impatiently; 'for Heaven's sake don't cry, and I'll promise anything! I won't go and see Lady Conroy. I'll take you back to India to-morrow, if it pleases you better. I'll leave the letter unanswered, whatever she may think of me. I'll do anything and everything, so long as you'll

dry your eyes and hold your tongue. For I have told you over and over again, that tears and reproaches are the two things I cannot stand.'

He turned away from her as he spoke, having first torn up Fenella's letter and consigned it to his waste-paper basket; and as his wife heard him march downstairs and leave the house again, she felt as if the victory had been hardly won. But she had never forgotten the words that Geoffrey had addressed to her on the occasion of the renewal of their engagement—the words in which he told her that he loved another woman, and that it would be a blasphemy and a sacrilege to unite himself to her. She had been jealous of this shadow rival all through her married life, and she had watched eagerly for the least symptom of regret on her husband's part. She knew that she had not made him happy; she was perfectly aware that she had never entered into his life, nor been more

to him than the woman who bore his name; and she had ever been on the look-out, in consequence, for this favoured creature who possessed Geoffrey's heart, and usurped his thoughts, and made him evermore a stranger to herself. And now that she had appeared in the person of the brilliant and fascinating and courted Lady Conroy, poor Jessie's jealousy knew no bounds. She would gladly have killed Fenella with her own hands, if such a revenge had been feasible; but failing that, she would kill her with her tongue, and make such an open scandal of any designs she might harbour against her husband as to render them impracticable through fear of discovery.

Mrs Doyne was not a high-minded woman. She could not conceive one of her own sex being too noble and generous and honourable to attempt to take her husband from her. She credited Lady Conroy from the first with the very lowest motives in desiring to see him,

and thoroughly believed there was no safety for either, except in keeping them entirely apart.

Geoffrey did not answer Fenella's note, and he felt miserable in consequence. He moped both in the house and out of it; he refused to accompany his wife to any parties for fear of meeting Lady Conroy, and talked seriously of cutting short her pleasure altogether, by taking her down to Ryelands for the remainder of his leave.

Mrs Doyne had, of course, returned Fenella's visit, but as she took care to choose an afternoon when she knew the latter did not receive visitors, and Captain Doyne was only represented by his card, no harm was done upon that occasion. But what with Geoffrey's continued low spirits, not to say bad temper, and his threats to leave London, matters seemed to be coming to a crisis, and Mrs Doyne considered it was time to consult her mamma on the subject.

Mrs Robertson was an ideal mother-in-law, always ready to receive the confidences of her married daughters, and to join them in a thorough good abuse of the absent husbands, which sent them home thoroughly discontented with their lot, and believing themselves to be the most ill-used women on the face of the earth. She had got four daughters off her hands by this time, but somehow Captain Doyne remained at the bottom of the list of her sons-in-law. She had never forgiven him for rupturing his engagement with Jessie, nor for the marked coolness he had displayed towards herself ever since. So Mrs Robertson was more than ready to discuss his failings and to track down his peccadilloes. She listened to all Jessie had to tell her of Lady Conroy's letter and Geoffrey's deceit, and how he *said* he didn't visit in Portman Square; but there was no saying what he did or didn't do, and any one could see that he was wretchedly out of spirits, and talked all

day about cutting his throat and wishing he had never been born.

'And do you know, mamma dear,' said Jessie, with big indignant eyes, 'he talks in his sleep now, which he *never* did before, and is so restless at night I really think I must have another room.'

'Ah! uneasy in his conscience,' suggested Mrs Robertson. 'You may depend on it he is deceiving you, my dear! and I should make a point, if I were you, of listening to what he says.'

'Well, I do, of course; but it's difficult to make out—he mumbles so. Only I know that last night he called out "Fenella" (that's her name, you know, mamma dear) several times, and said something about "*forgiveness*" or "*forgive me*," I don't know which.'

'Well, well! it is very sad,' sighed Mrs Robertson, 'and I can understand now his disgraceful conduct at the time of your marriage. He has had a *liaison* with this woman, my dear—there is no doubt of it,

or why should he want her to forgive him?—and probably he is carrying it on at this very moment. I should accuse him of it straight, if I were you.'

'Oh, mamma dear, he would be so angry.'

'Naturally! but in the surprise of the accusation he would betray himself. I remember once when your papa—however, perhaps I had better not bring him forward as an example on this occasion. But rely on it, Jessie, if there has been anything between this Lady Conroy and your husband, you had better know it. It can make no difference to the fact, and it gives a wife a hold that nothing else can do.'

'But how shall I tell him, mamma dear? Geoffrey can be very terrible, you know, when he gets into a temper.'

'Have a dream, my love—have a dream. I always make a point of dreaming when I am not quite sure of a thing. It throws a man off his guard, and you can watch the play of his countenance whilst you are relating it to him. Tell him you have

dreamt there was something between them at this place—what is it? Ines-cedwyn—and see what he looks like. You will soon be able to tell if your surmises are correct.'

'Oh, and if they are, what *shall* I do?' cried Jessie, with genuine distress. 'Mamma dear, it will make me miserable for life.'

'Nonsense, my dear! nothing of the sort. If every wife who finds out some former peccadillo of her husband were to become miserable for life, there wouldn't be a happy pair in the world. They're all alike, my dear, only some are more deceitful than others, and your husband is one of them.'

'I have been wretched ever since I suspected it,' sobbed Mrs Doyne. 'I wonder if Amy and Ellen and Nora have the same trouble with their husbands?'

'I hope they are not so silly as to make it a trouble,' rejoined Mrs Robertson sternly, 'and I shall feel very much

ashamed of you if you continue to do so. But you are foolishly fond of that man, Jessie, and he will make you rue your weakness yet.'

'He is *so* handsome,' sighed Mrs Doyne pathetically.

'"Handsome is as handsome does,"' rejoined her mother, 'and if you don't assert your dignity as a wife a little more than you do at present, you will find some day that your handsome husband has bolted from you with somebody else, and left you to dream of his beauty for the rest of your life.'

'He shall never bolt with Lady Conroy!' exclaimed her daughter angrily; '*I* will take care of that.'

'Very good, my dear; then don't forget the old proverb, "It's no use bolting the stable door after the steed is stolen." Take my advice, Jessie, and make your door fast at once, or your horse will be gone before you have had time to think about it.'

Armed with this maternal counsel, poor Jessie returned home still more suspicious and miserable than she had been on leaving it, and ready to magnify every molehill into a mountain. And, unfortunately for them all, the evening's post brought a second letter for Captain Doyne from Lady Conroy. Fenella had waited now three weeks for an answer to her first appeal. She had looked out eagerly for the Doynes at every party she had attended, and she had waited in several afternoons in hopes that Geoffrey might call; but she had seen nothing and heard nothing, and her patience was nearly exhausted. She could not believe it possible that Geoffrey had received her letter and neglected to answer it. Whatever his faults, he was too much of a gentleman for that. He would have written to her again, had it only been to refuse to see her. Therefore—so she concluded—there must have been some mistake in the matter. Either through the negligence of servants, or of his wife,

the note had been thrown aside and forgotten; and he did not even know that she had any desire to see or speak with him alone. And so, after a reasonable time had elapsed, she wrote him a second letter which was a little more impressive than the first, in which she told him she felt certain he could never have received her former communication, and asked him, for the sake of their old friendship, to go and see her before she left town, as she had something of importance to tell him.

Jessie, who had taken lately to watching the arrivals by the post with the eyes of a lynx, at once detected the monogram upon the envelope, as the letter was handed to her husband, and awaited the issue of his reading it with irrepressible impatience.

Captain Doyne's handsome face flushed darkly over its perusul, but when he had ended it, he replaced the note in the envelope with admirably enacted coolness, and put it carefully away in his pocket.

Mrs Doyne's indignation knew no bounds. She longed to follow her mother's advice and accuse her husband of perfidy then and there, but the servants were in attendance, and she was compelled to smother her rage until they should be left alone. Then it burst out with redoubled force for its repression, and she advanced upon Geoffrey with the face of a fury.

'You have received another letter from Lady Conroy,' she commenced loudly. 'Can you deny it?'

Captain Doyne regarded her with amazement, mingled with disgust. He had been exercising a great deal of self-denial for her sake during the last few few weeks, and considered it most unjust that she should bring him to task in this manner for a circumstance which was beyond his own control. The knowledge of his innocence made him for the moment brave.

'I have no wish to deny it,' he

answered. 'My letter *is* from Lady Conroy.'

'And yet you declared you would not write to her?'

'I have not written to her.'

'I don't believe it! and if you have not written to her, you have *seen* her, which is a great deal worse.'

'You must believe what you choose, Jessie. For my own part, I am sick and tired to death of these aimless discussions,' said Geoffrey, as he tried to pass her out of the room. But Jessie placed herself in his way.

'Will you show me that letter?' she demanded.

'Most certainly not. The letter does not concern you in the slightest degree.'

'But I *insist* upon seeing it. I am your wife, and I have a right to see it. It is shameful that you should receive letters from other women that you cannot show to me. And I won't stand it any longer—I won't! I *won't!*'

'Please don't make a fuss about it,' he said; 'you will not get your own way any the sooner, Jessie, for attempting to coerce me. You ought to know that by this time,' and Captain Doyne pushed past her, and escaped to his own room. She rushed after him like a little whirlwind. He had not time to lock his door against her, before she had invaded the sanctity of his threshold.

'Geoffrey,' she exclaimed, with blazing eyes, 'I *will* see that letter!'

'You will do no such thing! Have you gone mad? What do you mean by this behaviour?'

'I mean, that I've stood yours long enough, and that I will stand it no longer. I mean, that I don't believe you have not seen Lady Conroy, nor corresponded with her, since coming to London. I mean, that I believe you are as intimate with her as you ever were, only you are cunning enough to hide it from me, and that you are carry-

ing on just in the same way you did at Ines-cedwyn.'

Her husband turned round upon her quickly.

'What do you intend me to understand by that?' he asked, with a face the colour of ashes.

'Just what I say—what I know to be true—what I have known for a long time past—and what the whole world shall know into the bargain, if you don't put a stop to it now, at once and for ever.'

Geoffrey Doyne sat down upon the nearest chair, and passed his handkerchief over his brow.

'I—I—have not the slightest idea what you are alluding to,' he ejaculated presently.

But Jessie saw that she had hit the right nail upon the head, and her jealousy drove her almost beside herself.

'It's a nice thing, isn't it,' she said sneeringly, 'for a married man, whose wife has devoted her life to him, to leave home, day after day, without giving any

account of his proceedings, so that he may pass his time unrebuked by the side of his former mistress?'

Captain Doyne sprang to his feet.

'It's a lie!' he exclaimed. 'I have never spoken to Lady Conroy since we came to London.'

'And is the other a lie too?' demanded his wife. 'Will you deny that also?'

Geoffrey sat down again.

'Yes,' he replied, in a low, uncertain voice, 'I do!'

'And you're *a Christian!*' said Jessie sarcastically; 'you're a good, religious man, who is always preaching to your soldiers, and saying your prayers, and telling other people what they ought to do! You are a fit person to preach, are you not? *You*, who married me whilst you had got a mistress at Ines-cedwyn!'

'What do you mean by repeating that accusation?' he said, in a hoarse voice. 'Have I not already denied it? How dare you take away another woman's re-

putation in that way? Do you know that you render yourself liable to an action for libel by it?'

'I don't know anything about libel, and I don't care anything about it,' replied Mrs Doyne. 'I would risk a hundred actions sooner than submit to be insulted and deceived, as you are insulting and deceiving me. You *know* that there is something between you and Lady Conroy. You were more than lovers when you broke off your engagement with me for her sake. Can you look me in the face and tell me it is not true?'

'I shall not look you in the face, nor tell you anything,' he answered.

'Then I shall be less reticent. I shall write to Sir Gilbert Conroy, and tell him what I know about you and his wife.'

Geoffrey started to his feet.

'Jessie! you would never do such a vile, such a wicked thing as that?'

'Why shouldn't I? Why should I show any consideration for you when you show

none for me? You refuse to tell me anything! You deny the truth to my face, and you expect me to hold my tongue in the same manner! But I sha'n't. If you refuse to place any confidence in me, I shall adopt my own course of action, and make your conduct as public as I possibly can.'

'What would be the use of my telling you the secrets of my former life?' demanded her husband. 'What good would it do? I am faithful to you now, and have been ever since our marriage. You have no right to ask for more.'

'I have a right to use my information as I choose, and I shall do so,' retorted Jessie. 'I shall write to Sir Gilbert Conroy, and your father and mine, and everybody whom it may concern, and tell them all I know.'

'You will only disgrace your sex and yourself by the action,' he said.

'I shall disgrace Lady Conroy, and perhaps make a separation between her and

her husband. That is much more to the purpose,' replied Mrs Doyne.

'If you *do!*' said Geoffrey threateningly, with a clenched hand.

'And if I *do*, what then? Am I to be expected to bear all this misery without saying a word? You might have prevented it, Geoffrey! You might prevent it now by telling me the truth.'

'There are some things no man can tell,' replied her husband.

'But to his wife—a man may tell anything to his wife. And isn't it the case, now? Wasn't there something more than mere love-making between you and Lady Conroy before our marriage?'

'You have no right to ask me such a question, nor to mention another woman's name in connection with mine. You are driving me most dishonourably into a corner by doing so.'

'You cannot deny it though! You cannot tell me on your word of honour that she has never been anything to you!'

'She was a very dear friend.'

'Geoffrey, you are trying to trick me again, and I will not be tricked. Swear to me, as there is a God in heaven, that you never did more than make love to Lady Conroy, and I'll promise not to write those letters.'

'I will not swear anything.'

'Say "*No*," then, and I believe you.'

'Suppose I *were* to tell you, will you promise not only *not* to write those letters, but never to open your mouth upon the subject again—to me or any one?'

'Yes, I promise.'

'Very well, then, it *is* true. She was once more than all the world to me. No power on earth should have torn the secret from my lips, except to save her reputation. You have wrung it from me by most unworthy means, and I don't think you will be any the happier for its possession. But from this moment I refuse ever to speak to you on the subject again.'

'I don't wish to do so. It is a hateful

subject to me. Only it is not quite ended yet, Geoffrey.'

'What more do you want of me?'

'You must write and tell Lady Conroy that I know it.'

'No. By God! that I never will,' he exclaimed, striking his fist upon the table. 'You have degraded me sufficiently in my own sight, and I refuse to fall a step lower.'

'Then *I* shall do so.'

'Jessie, you *promised*, if I confessed the truth, that you would take no further steps in the matter.'

'I will not write to the husband, perhaps, but Lady Conroy must certainly know what has passed between us, or it will be useless. You must write and tell her, Geoffrey, that you have told me the secret, and that for the future she must never communicate with you nor try to see you.'

'I refuse to do it.'

'Then I shall adhere to my first resolution and write to Sir Gilbert.'

Captain Doyne looked in his wife's face. It had the expression of a demon. Jealousy was distorting every feature, and he felt she might be capable of anything. What was he to do? Fenella's reputation must be secured at any price.

'What is it you expect of me?' he asked sullenly.

'Just what I said. Here is pen and paper. Sit down and write to her at once.'

Geoffrey took the seat she pushed towards him. After all, he thought (in his self-blinded way of thinking), Jessie might be but an instrument in the hands of Providence to save him from further transgression. He was perfectly aware that his late misery was caused by not seeing Fenella, and by feeling how dear she still was to him. This letter (however cruel to himself and her) would at least be the means of putting an end to all irresolution on the subject. She would never see him after receiving it. It might prove the salvation of them both.

Misguided Geoffrey! As if Providence, the loving Father of us all, ever worked by lacerating His creatures' hearts, until each quivering nerve is exposed to the gaze of the world! It is human nature alone that can be guilty of such barbarity. But, fortified by the conclusion at which he had arrived, Captain Doyne caught up his pen and wrote quickly,—

'My dear Lady Conroy,—I write to tell you that I have informed my wife of every particular relating to our former intimacy; after which I feel sure you will make no further effort to see me, nor to communicate with me.—I am, yours sincerely, Geoffrey Doyne.'

As he wrote the concluding words, he laid his head down upon the paper and burst into tears.

'I *cannot* send it!' he exclaimed. 'It is unmanly, cowardly, impossible! I *cannot* send it!'

Mrs Doyne lost all patience with him.

'Then I shall not give you another opportunity!' she cried. 'I shall go at once to Blenheim Square and tell them the reason, and write my letters from there to-morrow morning.'

An open scandal and rupture! This would be worse than the other. Geoffrey felt that it must not be. He pulled his wife into the room again.

'Be sensible,' he said; 'bear with me, and I will write the letter again. This one is too much blotted to go.'

He drew the writing-case to him with the air of a man who is compelled to sign the death-warrant of his dearest friend; and having deliberately re-written the letter, placed it in an envelope, and gave it into her hands to be sent to the post; and then he flung himself, disgraced, dishonoured for evermore in his own sight and that of the world, face downwards upon a couch.

So his wife found him half-an-hour afterwards. She took a seat beside him

and put her hand affectionately on his. She was anxious, now that she had gained her own way, to be friends again with her husband.

But Geoffrey pushed her hand impatiently from him.

'Make it up again, Geoffrey,' she whispered. 'I daresay I said some very angry things, but I will never speak of the subject again now, to mamma or any one. I promise you.'

But he refused to answer her.

'Are you still angry with me?' she whimpered. 'Can't you understand it was my love for you that made me so jealous and unhappy? And even now it isn't pleasant for me to think of what she has been to you. But I will forgive and forget everything, Geoffrey dear, if you will only kiss me and be friends again.'

'What is the good of *your* forgiving and forgetting,' he answered, with his face still turned away, 'when *I* shall never forgive *myself* for what I have done to-

night? Go away, Jessie, and leave me alone. Be satisfied with the hell into which you have plunged me. Neither you nor anybody else can ever do me any good again.'

She had gained her purpose; she had effectually separated him from Lady Conroy for the future. But the reward of virtue did not appear so satisfactory as it should have done. A reward seldom does come to those who seek it selfishly, irrespective of the hearts they may trample on by the way. That letter, however, did not reach Fenella's hands—as it should have done—upon the following morning. She had spent the previous day and night at Richmond, and as she drove home again late in the afternoon, her carriage laden with roses, she called at Mrs Culleton's to give her some.

She found that lady in her walking attire, having just come in from paying a round of calls.

'How good of you, dear Lady Conroy,'

she cooed, as she received her share of roses. 'I never saw more splendid blooms. And so you have been to Richmond with a party?'

'No; only Sir Gilbert and myself. He thought I looked pale and required a little fresh air, so we went down and slept at the Star and Garter, and I have just dropped him at his club on our way home.'

'You *do* look pale, dear Lady Conroy, and as if you had been worried. I am afraid you are fretting after your beautiful baby.'

Fenella blushed.

'I should dearly like to have a look at my baby,' she said, 'but I have not been fretting about her. I have been worried by many little things lately. We all have our share of trouble in this world, you know.'

'Ah yes, indeed! Who is free from it? I have just come from seeing our mutual friends the Doynes, and they both seemed in such bad spirits, they have quite depressed me.'

'What is the matter with them?' demanded Lady Conroy quickly.

'I cannot tell you; they did not confide in me; but there was something wrong—I could see that plainly. The Captain looked pale and harassed, and Mrs Doyne quite unlike herself. And they talk of leaving town, too, directly.'

'*Directly!*' echoed Fenella.

'Yes; to-morrow, if I understood them rightly. They intend to spend the rest of their time at Ryelands, which is his father's place in Buckinghamshire. I asked Captain Doyne what he meant by leaving town in the height of the season, and he said he was sick of it and should be glad to get away. There is evidently something very wrong between them. A great pity, isn't it? Such young people too, and only married a few years.'

'Everybody seems miserable in this world,' said Fenella, in a low voice.

'Everybody but yourself, dear Lady Conroy. I am sure no one would believe

you could be miserable, with that dear good husband of yours, and that charming child.'

'Oh no, of course not! Present company is always excepted, you know,' replied Fenella, with a forced smile. 'And did you say you had *just* left the Doynes, Mrs Culleton?'

'Not half-an-hour ago. I entered my drawing-room as your carriage drove to the door.'

'Then, perhaps, if I went there now, I should find them at home. I owe Mrs Doyne a visit, and should be sorry for her to leave town without my paying it.'

'Certainly you would; and she will be so pleased to see you, Lady Conroy. Poor little soul! it will cheer her up. I cannot suspect that handsome creature, Captain Doyne, of being unkind to any one; but if he had given his wife a good beating, she could not have looked more forlorn than she did this afternoon.'

And thereupon Lady Conroy took leave

of Mrs Culleton, and ordered her coachman to drive to Half-Moon Street. As her carriage bore her thither, she had no idea of what she was going to say, or do. She was like a person about to attempt a perilous leap; her heart was in such a flutter of excitement, she had no power to look beyond the imminent present—the future, with all its possibilities, must take care of itself. All she knew was that Geoffrey Doyne was going to leave London on the morrow, and her last chance of seeing him and telling him of Valeria was at stake. And each day made the revelation of more importance in her eyes; each day something was said or done to make her feel how dishonourable a part she would act in leaving Sir Gilbert any longer in the dark with regard to the parentage of the child he believed to be his own. Only that morning he had been telling her (jestingly, of course, but still with undeniable truth beneath its surface) that

if she brought him no sons, although the title must necessarily lapse to a distant cousin, Valeria would inherit all his estates and fortune.

'And a nice trouble we shall have with the young lady in that case,' added Sir Gilbert; 'it will be as much as we shall be able to do to keep her to ourselves till she is grown up. The men will be swarming round her like flies round a pot of honey.'

And Fenella had laughed, and felt the cords tighten round her heart as she did so. For she had never thought of this. She had never dreamt, when she took her fatherless baby to her heart, in place of the little one she had left in the cemetery of Hyères, that Valeria might become the heiress to Sir Gilbert's lands and fortune. And if—*if* she should never have a son? It was impossible that the fraud should go on any longer. She had acknowledged *that* to herself as she drove from Richmond the same afternoon. And

then to hear that Geoffrey was about to leave London; to go to the country, where she could only communicate with him by letter—letters which might never reach him, or, if explanatory, must compromise both herself and the child.

It was whilst thinking of such complications that Lady Conroy resolved (whatever came of it) she *must* see and speak with him. And so firm was she in her resolution, that had Captain Doyne been from home, she would have asked leave to wait until he returned. Still, if she could find a reasonable excuse for her visit, it would be better for all parties. She had her roses to take to Mrs Doyne—flowers were always graciously received by ladies in London—and there could be no harm in saying that Mrs Culleton had told her they were leaving for the country, and she had wished to bid them farewell. Luckily for her courage, the carriage set her down in Half-Moon Street before it had had time to

evaporate, and the servant at once showed her upstairs.

Geoffrey and his wife were sitting together, much as Mrs Culleton had described them — silent, dejected, and ill-at-ease. He had expressed his determination to take her down to Rye-lands the following morning, and they had spent the day in wandering about the house, seeing to the packing of their several possessions, and feeling utterly miserable, not to say hopeless. Now the business part of the matter was over, they were both too tired to go out, or seek any amusement, and they were forced to endure each other's company, although they did not dare open their mouths, for fear of making matters worse. Jessie was wretched in the consciousness that her late conduct had driven her farther than ever from her husband's heart; whilst Geoffrey felt as if he could never hold up his head amongst his fellow-men again.

They were in this pitiable condition when the drawing-room door was suddenly thrown open and Lady Conroy was announced. For the first moment they could not trust their ears. Had a shell been thrown, and exploded in their midst, they could not have been more taken aback. Believing (as they did) that the insulting letter of the night before had reached her hands, Fenella's presence there could hold but one meaning for them. She had come to ask an explanation of the affront which had been offered her. Both husband and wife rose quickly to their feet as the servant uttered her name. Geoffrey, pale as ashes, stood in the background, wondering if he could possibly make his escape before Lady Conroy observed him; whilst Jessie, with the insolent temerity of her sex, advanced to the front with an air of determined hostility.

Fenella entered the room with a firm step, but a sinking heart, which, at the first sight of the man she had loved with her

whole soul, seemed to die out altogether. But her hands were filled with roses, and she walked up to Jessie with a smile that belied the terror in her eyes.

'How do you do, Mrs Doyne?' she said nervously. 'I have come from Mrs Culleton's, who told me you are going to leave town. I am *so* sorry. Will you accept a few roses from me? I have just brought them fresh from Richmond.'

Then, without waiting for an answer, she turned to the silent figure at the other side of the room, who had not advanced one step to greet her.

'How do you do, Captain Doyne?' she repeated, holding out her hand without raising her eyes. 'What a long time it is since we met! I have been hoping to see you several times. I trust you are quite well?'

She looked at him hurriedly as she concluded the sentence, and met a glance so startling as to cause her immediately to return to Mrs Doyne. Jessie by this time

had recovered her self-possession, and was ready to meet her opponent.

'I *wonder*,' she said, in a harsh voice, the very fac-simile of her mother's,—'I *wonder* you trouble yourself to come and see *us*, Lady Conroy, after the letter you received from my husband last night; but *some* people have no delicacy of feeling.'

Fenella saw at once that she had committed an error. Some one had prejudiced this woman against her. She would have given her life to be anywhere else at that particular moment—she felt like an animal caught in a trap; but the fearless spirit she had inherited from her father came to her aid, and she would have stood her ground in the face of a dozen women.

'I do not understand the tone you adopt towards me, Mrs Doyne,' she replied, with a loftily-carried head, 'neither am I aware to what letter you allude. I came here this afternoon in kindness, and I appeal to Captain Doyne to see me protected from insult in his own house.'

The indignant colour flamed up into her fair face as she spoke—the white and rose and damask blossoms dropped from her hands upon the floor; she turned a look on Geoffrey, half entreating, half-reproachful, that made him long to clasp her in his arms.

'Jessie,' he exclaimed, 'I forbid you to speak another word to Lady Conroy.'

'I *shall* speak to her,' replied his wife shrilly. 'What was the use of your writing that letter to her if she is to come here as if nothing had happened, when she ought to be ashamed to show her face in the some room with me.

'*Ashamed!*' cried Fenella quickly.

'Yes, Lady Conroy, *ashamed!* When you know how you went with my husband at Ines-cedwyn, and how you made him break off his engagement with me—the most dishonourable thing on earth a man can do. And even now you can't let him alone; now that he's got a wife and you have a husband. And yet you

go writing letters to him, and making appointments! and it's disgraceful and wicked of you, and every one would say the same.'

Fenella had turned deadly white during this speech — white as the lily she once so much resembled; and she was compelled to steady herself by holding on to the back of a chair.

'Captain Doyne,' she said presently, in a strangely measured voice, '*who* told your wife this story?'

'I assure you, Lady Conroy,' he answered, 'this is a most painful interview to me, and I should be infinitely obliged if you would permit me to terminate it. I can see no good that can arise from such a discussion, and it is diametrically opposed to any wish of mine that Mrs Doyne should have introduced it.'

'I don't think you have answered my question,' said Fenella quickly. 'I want to know *from whom* Mrs Doyne received her information?'

'Why, from himself, of course,' interposed Jessie; 'who else *could* tell me? You were both close enough about the matter; and I consider that I have been treated shamefully, and so has Sir Gilbert Conroy.'

At this allusion Fenella turned upon her rival warmly.

'Confine your remarks, if you please, Mrs Doyne, to the conduct of your own husband,' she said, 'and leave mine out of the question. However much Captain Doyne may have deceived *you*, Sir Gilbert knew *my* history before he married me. And I will not hear his name mentioned by your lips.'

'Dear me! I had no idea you were such a devoted couple. Does he know that you write letters to Geoffrey still, and ask him to go and see you alone, until you make quarrels between us, and force him to tell the whole story to me, in order to save himself from open scandal and disgrace? Yes, Lady Conroy!

you need not stare at me in that rude manner. I know everything—*everything*. And now, perhaps, you will not take the trouble to call on us again!'

Fenella did not answer her assailant. She turned her incredulous face, frozen with horror, upon Geoffrey Doyne.

'Is this true?' she asked him. 'Have you told her *everything?*'

He crimsoned with the awful shame of confession. He stammered like a schoolboy. Once or twice his hand went up to his cravat, as though he were choking for want of air.

'I thought it best,' he said at last. 'She partially knew it; in fact, she accused me of it. And—of course, she will never repeat it; the secret is safe with her—and—well, I *did* tell her.'

Then there was silence between them for a few moments, broken only by Fenella's voice.

'When I was a girl of sixteen,' she uttered slowly, 'ill in body, and broken

in spirit, my mother used me with such violence and cruelty, in order to make me reveal your name, that she drove me to attempt suicide. But no one has ever heard me speak it. I have guarded your honour, through years of silence and suffering and suspense, faithfully — as I shall guard it (for the sake of what has been) to my life's end. And you—*you* have betrayed me to a woman! Geoffrey Doyne, *you are a coward!*'

She looked him full in the face as she pronounced the words between her teeth, and, turning slowly on her heel, left the room. What use was there in her remaining? The object with which she had entered it had been entirely frustrated by his confession. Was it likely that the man who could expose her weakness for himself to his own wife, would ever befriend or own her child? Fenella felt as if the nearest workhouse would accord Valeria as warm a welcome. *He had betrayed her!* It seemed incredible—

impossible; she would sooner have believed him guilty of murder or of theft, than of giving up the name (and with the name, the reputation) of the woman he had ruined—placing her character, her position in her husband's household, her right (for aught he knew) to her only child in jeopardy, by exposing her to the very woman of all others who would be most likely to make use of the knowledge. Her head swam when she thought of such a treachery. Every principle which she had been reared from childhood to regard as an article of faith, seemed overthrown by the confession she had just heard. Women are taught to place such implicit confidence in the honour of the men to whom they entrust their own. It is part of their creed; they believe (as they do in heaven) that though the man who loves and leaves them may be utterly fickle, worthless, and unreliable, *he will never tell.* He cannot; it would be a blasphemy, an outrage, to betray the

identity of the woman who has given up everything in the world for him. This is the feminine gospel, but of late years (if all that one hears is true) it has been but too often overthrown. Women who are careless deserve, perhaps, to find others as careless as themselves, but with such want of faith the age of chivalry has passed. It will be all the better for the weaker sex. It will save them from many a foible into which their former perfect security in the honour of men might have betrayed them; but the treachery will rebound upon some one. Who knows if the women, shred of all belief in their natural protectors, may not begin to consider it unnecessary to keep faith with any? Once, they believed them secure in silence as the grave; now, they know that they chatter as much as themselves. And is there any chance that a woman will ever retrace her footsteps when all the world has been made cognisant of her shame?

CHAPTER IV.

A SEPARATION.

'Whether we shall meet again, I know not;
Therefore our everlasting farewell take;
For ever and for ever, farewell Cassius.'

Shakespeare.

THE issue of this visit had exactly the same effect upon Fenella as the announcement of Geoffrey Doyne's marriage had produced four years previously. *It stunned her.* As she returned to her home in Portman Square, she seemed to have lost all power of feeling or action. She moved and spoke like an automaton. Her senses were in abey-

ance. They were paralysed by the shock she had received. For, from the hour that she had reclaimed his little child, she had been trying to think so much more leniently of Geoffrey Doyne; to judge his actions from a broader and more generous point of view; to find excuses for his desertion of her, and to believe, somehow, that she must have been in the wrong as well as he. She had watched Valeria's daily growing likeness to the face which (though she knew to be false) she still loved so dearly, until the darker shadows of her life had cleared away, and she had remembered only the flowers, and the golden sands, and the singing of the birds at Ines-cedwyn, and forgiven the father for the sake of the child. But to find him guilty of a dishonourable action — to believe him mean and false and cowardly, — *this* was a calamity Fenella had never contemplated. It struck her a twofold blow. It not only made her lose all faith in

him; it made her dread lest she should live to be smitten over again in the person of his child. For if Geoffrey proved to be all that was most contemptible in her eyes, what guarantee had she that Valeria would not take after him; that she might not rear her daughter to be a woman who should eventually turn round upon her and expose her frailty to the world? No one but the unfortunate victim herself could know how this second blow prostrated her. She crawled up to her bedroom as if she had been struck with paralysis, and groped her way to a chair as if she were blind. And there she sat, silent and immovable, staring into vacancy, until the dinner-gong had sounded for the second time. Her maid had several times knocked at the door for admittance, but without effect. Sir Gilbert Conroy himself was the first to invade her sanctum, from his dressing-room.

'Why, Fenella,' he exclaimed, 'what are

you dreaming of? It is past seven, and the dinner is on the table.'

At the sound of his familiar voice she started—started violently, and then burst into tears. Her husband was quite distressed by her emotion. He had noticed her pallor and depression for some days past, and feared she was ill.

'What is the matter, my dear?' he said kindly. 'I am afraid you have over-tired yourself. Would you prefer having dinner served to you in your own room?'

'Oh no, no, Gilbert!' she exclaimed, clinging to him convulsively; 'I want no dinner. I cannot eat nor drink till I have spoken to you. I am so miserable, I wish that I was dead.'

The baronet was now really alarmed.

'My dearest Fenella, pray compose yourself. You are hysterical, and had better retire to rest at once. Let me send your maid to fetch you a glass of wine. All these parties and balls have been too much for you.'

'No; don't let her come in. Let me be quite alone with you! For I *must* speak to you, Gilbert, although you have forbidden me to do so. At the risk of making you angry, I must speak. I cannot bear the burden by myself any longer.'

'My dear girl, don't talk of making me angry. If it is any relief to you to speak to me (though I cannot imagine what on earth you can have to say), tell me your troubles at once. I suppose you have got into debt, you silly child, or lost some of your jewels. To whom should you confide your difficulties, if not to your husband?'

'Oh, Gilbert, you have always been so generous and kind to me, it makes it all the harder to speak! But you are a gentleman, and I know that, at any rate, you will respect me for being honest, and sympathise with the insult I have received.'

'*Insult*, my dear! Who has *dared* to insult my wife? Tell me his name at once, and rest satisfied he shall be punished as he deserves.'

'Listen to me, dear Gilbert, and I will tell you everything. You remember, when you proposed to me, that my mother made a communication to you respecting some portion of my former history?'

'I remember,' replied Sir Gilbert, with knitting brows.

'It was at my request she did so—more, it was at my command; for I utterly refused to see you again until you were fully acquainted with every circumstance that might militate in your eyes against my becoming your wife. And you passed it over. You were noble enough to forgive all—on condition that I never mentioned the circumstance in your hearing.'

'I recall the matter perfectly,' said Sir Gilbert, 'and I trust you are not going to infringe on that condition now.'

'I *must*, dear Gilbert—indeed I must! I have mentioned it to no one (except Bennett), as you may well believe; but circumstances have occurred lately that

make it imperatively necessary I should speak to you on the subject.'

Sir Gilbert's frown became still more ominous; he began to fear the former lover had cropped up again. But his wife's head was bowed upon her hands, and she did not read the expression of his countenance.

'I have done you a great wrong, Gilbert,' she continued, 'an unpardonable wrong, but I did not see it in so strong a light at the time I did it.'

'Pooh, pooh! my dear,' said her husband; 'don't get in the way of exaggerating matters. I am quite sure you have not done anything that I shall not find easy to forgive. Now, what is it?'

'It is much more than you can ever have any idea of. Oh! don't look at me in that way, or I shall never have courage to confess it.'

'Fenella!' said Sir Gilbert sternly, 'have you disgraced the name you bear? Have you been unfaithful to me?'

'No, no! God forbid! What can you think of me, to put such a question? The woman who professes to love her husband whilst she betrays him, is not fit to live. Gilbert, I could not be so base as that.'

'Then I care little for what you may have to tell me,' he replied, with a look of relief; 'but if *that* had been true, I would have killed you with my own hand!"

Lady Conroy took courage. What she had to reveal dwindled by comparison with her husband's suspicion.

'I could not be so wicked as that,' she said. 'This is bad enough. What will you say to me, Gilbert, when I tell you that Valeria is not your child?'

'*Not my child!* when you have just told me—'

'Yes; and I spoke the truth. I have been true to you from the moment we met. But—but—our little girl died whilst I was at Hyères,' she continued, in a faltering voice, 'and — I was deceitful

enough to adopt Valeria in her stead, and never tell you a word about it.'

Sir Gilbert looked as if he thought his wife had gone out of her mind.

'You must be raving,' he said; 'you cannot know what you are talking about. Adopt Valeria instead of our child? But why should you do such a thing? What motive could you possibly have for bringing up any child that was not your own?'

'But that is the secret, Gilbert. *She is my own!* My mother doubtless told you (as she told me) that my infant was dead. She did that, it seems, in hopes of saving my reputation. But when our baby died at Hyères, and Bennett saw me inconsolable for its loss, she told me (what I had never heard before) that my other poor child was alive—left in the charge of strangers, without a soul on whom she had a claim, to love her or look after her. And then the thought came into my head to bring her home instead of our lost little one, and I did so. But I have been very un-

happy about it ever since, and longed to tell you; but I waited in hopes that——that friends might come forward and assist me. But that hope is over now—and I felt I could not rest to-night until you knew the truth.'

Sir Gilbert had been standing near his wife during this harangue, totally unable to believe his ears; and when she had concluded, and it was his turn to speak, his voice was so altered, she hardly recognised it.

'*What* do you say your mother told me?' he demanded, in a harsh, grating tone.

'About—about—my baby,' she replied, with a face on fire with shame, 'and all the disgrace and misery attending it!'

'*It is a lie!*' he said fiercely. 'If she said she had informed me of that, she told a lie. I never heard a word of the matter until this moment.'

Lady Conroy sprang from her seat.

'*What!*' she exclaimed. '*What!* Do

you mean to say that you married me without knowing that I—I—had fallen?'

'Do you mean to say that you suppose I would have married you had I known it?' he cried in his turn. '*I*—*I*—who consider that the name I have given you is worthy to be borne only by the purest and most innocent of women!—who would have remained single all my life, sooner than have bestowed it upon one who was unfit to be the wife of any man! I don't believe you thought so; I believe you were a party to the plot hatched by your wretched mother to deceive me; I believe you pawned yourself upon me, knowing that the time must come when your shame would be my shame, and it would be impossible to separate the two. Oh, my God! how I wish I had taken your life or my own, before I had lived to hear what you have told me this day!' And throwing himself into the nearest chair, Sir Gilbert Conroy groaned in the bitterness of his soul.

Fenella passed her hand across her forehead, as if she were trying to collect her senses.

'Have I heard you right?' she uttered presently. 'Is it really true that you never learnt this story till to-day?'

'Can you have a better proof of it than that you bear the name of Lady Conroy?' he replied bitterly.

'Oh, mother, mother!' wailed Fenella, '*what* have you done? Was it not sufficient to leave me as you did—a mere child, unprotected and alone, to fall into such fearful error—without entailing me, as a life-long curse, upon one of the best and most generous of men? Gilbert! Gilbert!' she cried, as she fell upon her knees beside him, 'forgive me for having been made the tool of my mother's miserable ambition, but don't think I deceived you willingly, for indeed —*indeed*—I did not.'

'I *cannot* forgive you,' he answered brokenly. 'Whosoever was the crime,

the curse remains that I have placed an unworthy woman in my mother's seat. And then (as if that were not enough) you dare to bring your base-born child beneath my very roof, and pass it off as a Conroy! If I *could* (but it would have been impossible), but if I *could* have overlooked the fault of which you declare yourself guiltless, I *never* would have forgiven the one which you confess. It proves you lost to all sense of decency.'

'Oh, Gilbert! I love her so,' she sobbed; 'how could I help loving her—my poor forsaken child, without home or parents or provision? Had I known of her existence, she never would have been left in that condition; when I *did* know of it, I felt as if I must give up everything I possessed, sooner than neglect her longer.'

'And yet you gave up *nothing*,' he sneered, 'but brought her to my house instead—to live a lie.'

I 'know it was wrong—bitterly false

and wrong. God knows! I have repented it sorely since. But try and make some allowance for me, Gilbert. A mother's love is so strong—so very, *very* strong. It burns just the same if her child's birth has been honourable or dishonourable. However she may have been insulted or betrayed, she cannot forget that her own infant has claims upon her above all the rest of the world.'

'And where is the scoundrel who brought you into this plight?' demanded Sir Gilbert fiercely. 'Why didn't he marry you? What was he about, to leave you to bring disgrace and ruin upon the house of an honest man?'

'He deserted me long ago,' she answered.

'And have you seen him since you have been my wife?'

'Yes! twice. I *tried* to see him, that I might tell him of the deception of which I had been guilty, and ask him to help

me to confess the truth to you. But—but—he is married—and—he cannot help me!'

'The villain!' exclaimed Sir Gilbert. 'I wish I had his neck beneath my heel, that I might crush his life out! The cur! to leave the girl he had ruined, to bring disgrace upon an honourable family like mine. What is his name?' he said suddenly. 'Tell me his name at once, that I may have my revenge upon him.'

But Fenella drew herself up, and was silent.

'Do you hear what I say to you, madam?' thundered her husband. 'Tell me the name of the man who is the cause of all this misery.'

'I have told you all that concerns myself and you,' she answered; 'and if there were anything more to confess, I would do it, never mind at what cost to myself. But *his* name is what I will never reveal to any one It is sacred to me, as is his child.

She lifted her eyes to heaven as she spoke, and could Geoffrey Doyne have seen her then, he would have thought her more worthy of his love than in the days of his most ardent passion for her.

Her refusal irritated Sir Gilbert into forgetting his usual courtliness.

'But I *insist* upon knowing it,' he exclaimed, as he seized her roughly by the arm. 'We have had enough concealments already, Lady Conroy, and I demand to hear the name of this former lover of yours, *as a right*.'

'If it *were* a right, you should have it, Gilbert, but it would but increase the wrong for me to utter it. What good could it do? Would you double the injury by making it public?'

'You only assume this grandiloquent air because you wish to hide it,' he replied, as he shook her angrily. 'An open avowal would prevent your continuing to meet this lover of yours in

private, and lamenting with him over the obscure condition of your child.'

'I have not deserved this at your hands,' was all she answered.

Sir Gilbert became beside himself. He flew to a case of pistols which lay on his dressing-table, and catching up a loaded revolver, held it close to her ear.

Fenella felt the cold steel touch her flesh and send a shudder throughout her frame, but she stood firm to her ground. She would die before she would give up Geoffrey's name.

'We sinned together,' she thought. 'I was as much to blame as he. I will never be such a coward as to deliver him up to the scorn of the world, from which I would so gladly shield myself.'

'Will you tell me that man's name?' shouted Sir Gilbert, with the muzzle of the revolver still held against her ear.

'No!' she answered. 'You may kill me, but I will not make a bad matter worse by adding treachery to shame. Re-

venge yourself on me as you will, but don't make me fall lower than I have already done.'

Her husband dropped the hand that held the pistol. He was already ashamed of the violence into which he had been betrayed.

'I can *never* forget what has passed between us this evening,' he said. 'The shameful story will be written in letters of blood before my eyes until my dying day. But for the sake of the family, and my name, I will consent to ignore it, on two conditions. One is, that you never see, nor speak to, nor communicate with that man in your life again. Do you understand me?'

Fenella's eyes assumed a look of despair. Even at that moment, when he had proved himself to be most unworthy of her regard, her heart shrunk from the idea of never seeing Geoffrey Doyne again as if it had been a sentence of death.

'I am not likely to come in contact with him, and I will not seek to do so.

That is all that it is possible for me to promise you.'

'My second condition is, that the child is sent wherever I may see fit to send her, and that *she* also is never seen nor communicated with by you again.'

But this was what Fenella would not consent to.

'*No!*' she said firmly—'*that* is impossible. I will never give up the performance of a mother's duty towards my baby.'

'Did you expect that I would allow you to keep her with you, then?'

'I hardly know what I expected,' she said wearily; 'but I thought perhaps when you heard how terribly I had suffered, you might pardon the deception I have practised upon you, and allow me to retain Valeria by my side. But it is of no use arguing the matter, Gilbert. Nothing on earth shall induce me to give her up.'

'You love this man still?' he said jealously.

She shook her head.

'I don't think I do—not in any way, that is to say, that you need take as an insult to yourself. I know that I cannot esteem him; and with esteem the best part of love is lost. Only—he was very dear to me at one time; and — and — some things are not easily forgotten,' she ended, with a sigh.

'And for the sake of these tender memories of your youth, I am to rear and pass off this nameless brat as my own! Well, then, I refuse to do it. Either you give her up (at once and for ever), or you and I must part.'

'I cannot give her up,' repeated Fenella, with a fixed look of despair upon her pale features; 'I should be unworthy of the name of woman if I could consent to it. How could I live, how could I eat and drink and sleep, if *she*—the creature I brought into the world—my own flesh and blood —were friendless and outcast? Gilbert, you could never wish me to be so heartless—so cruel!'

'You must pay the penalty of your wrong-doing,' he said coarsely.

'I will not pay it by committing a greater sin,' she answered.

'Then you must take the consequences. If you refuse to part with that child, you part with me. Understand me plainly, Lady Conroy. I cannot strip you of the title you bear (I wish I could), but I am not obliged, at least, to keep a living witness in my sight of the folly which induced me to bestow it on you. Therefore, take this as my ultimatum. Either the child—or me. If you persist in your refusal to give her up, I will never live with you again.'

'I *do* persist in my refusal to give her up,' she repeated slowly, and as the words left her lips, Sir Gilbert passed her with an oath, and quitted the room; slamming the door violently after him.

Fenella heard the noise, and knew that he had gone, but she never stirred from her seat. She did not know how all this

would end. She believed some great calamity was hanging over her. But she did not once waver in her determination never to desert her child. She sat where her husband had left her, shedding a few natural tears over the failure of her frankness, and the name of '*Geoffrey*' came once or twice in a stifled sob from her lips. But she never stopped to consider for a moment if she could make her sense of what was right succumb to Sir Gilbert's desire to avert the consequences of what was wrong. It was part of the blight that Geoffrey Doyne had brought upon her—another phase of her life cut short and ruined by his means; and Fenella bowed her head to the inevitable as she had done before.

When her maid appeared upon the scene, begging to know if she intended to go down to dinner, she pleaded illness and went to her bed instead. But Sir Gilbert had left the house, and all through the sleepless night, and anxious day that fol-

lowed it, his wife heard nothing of him. She gave up her engagements (which, indeed, she had no heart to fulfil), and stayed at home in hopes of his return. Yet he did not come. But on the second morning after his departure, she received a letter from him—a cold, curt letter—embodying what he had said by word of mouth.

'Since you have refused all my overtures of kindness,' so it ran, 'you will not be surprised to find that I can be as determined as yourself. I write, therefore, to tell you that I leave England to-day, and that, whilst you continue in your obstinate refusal to do what is best for yourself, we shall never meet again. I have placed Conroy Castle at your disposal, as I have no wish openly to disgrace you, but the house in Portman Square will be put in the hands of my agents, to let during the term of my absence. All other particulars which it may be necessary for you to know, my sister Lady Marjoram has full instructions to acquaint you with. It is for the

sake of the honour of my family name alone that I have shown the leniency towards you which is displayed by the reticence I have observed. My sister knows *nothing*, except that we find it more conducive to our domestic happiness to live apart, and I trust to your discretion not to enlighten her further.'

'*The honour of his family name!*' said Fenella bitterly, as she concluded the letter. 'Yes, that is the first thing with Gilbert. Love and happiness are nothing in comparison. And does he think that I will consent to live at Conroy Castle—myself a prisoner, my child a dependant on his bounty—whilst he leaves my actions to be judged by the charitable world? If he does, he is very much mistaken. He will find that my pride—though it does not rest upon a stainless name—is equal to his own.'

She had hardly digested her letter, nor decided on the line of action she should take regarding it, when Lady Marjoram

rushed into her presence, all anxiety to find out what had caused a breach of the peace between them.

'My dear girl,' she exclaimed, in her off-hand manner, 'what have you been up to? Do you know that Bertie is going back to Sovooranooko? He was at our place half the night, raving like a madman, and declaring you and he could never live together again. What is it all about? I feel quite *bouleversée*. I have looked upon you as a model couple—a pattern husband and wife—and now to find there's a smash-up between you quite takes my breath away. And I suppose *you're* at the bottom of it—at least Bertie says so.'

'Yes, I suppose I am,' said Fenella, with a sigh.

'Well, what have you been doing, you naughty girl? Flirting, I suppose, and Bertie's intercepted a letter or a rendezvous, and there's the old gentleman to pay. Silly goose, not to manage your affairs better! Every woman flirts now-a-days.

I don't mind a little fun in that way myself, though I'm not an advocate for going too far (it leads to such vulgar *esdandres*); but no one should attempt it who is not a mistress of *finesse*. Who told him, dear? What did he find? I hope the man's name didn't transpire.'

'Indeed, you are mistaken, Janie; your brother's displeasure with me has not arisen from any fault in my conduct since I have been his wife. He ought to have done me the justice to tell you that.'

'Then what *is* it, my dear? Why have you quarrelled? It is a most foolish thing to have an open split in this way. Why should Bertie go back to Sovooranooko? He has seemed as happy as a king ever since his return.'

'I think he should have explained matters more satisfactorily to you himself, Janie, particularly as he writes this morning to enjoin silence on me. All I can tell you is that we have had a disagreement. Gilbert wished me to accede to a

certain desire of his, and he made our separation the condition of my refusal. It was impossible for me to consent without infringing on what I consider my duty. Therefore he has carried out his threat and left me. That is as much as I can tell you.'

'But, my dear Fenella—duty! What nonsense! No one thinks of such a thing now-a-days; and even if they did, surely your first duty is to obey your husband?'

'Not if he asks me to do what is wrong.'

'How tragical you look! One would think he had asked you to murder somebody. But you don't mean to carry it *too* far, do you? I assure you Bertie will leave England if you don't stop him. I never saw a man more determined in my life. And when it is too late to recall him, you will be sorry that you let him go.'

'I am sorry now. I shall be sorry under any circumstances, because I quite thought that he had begun to care for me; but I cannot take back my word. I believe with you that he will leave Eng-

land, and that we may never meet again. But it can make no difference—what he has asked of me is an impossibility.'

'Well, I never saw two such obstinate people in my life! And I never should have thought it of *you*, Fenella, who always seemed so yielding and amiable to him. And fancy living all the year round at Conroy Castle! Why, you will be buried alive. You will not be able to support your existence. Do think better of it, Fenella. That place is as cold as a churchyard in winter.'

'I do not intend to live there.'

'But Bertie says you *must*. He has given instructions to his bankers to honour your drafts to a certain amount every quarter, on condition that you live at the Castle.'

'I am very much obliged to Sir Gilbert Conroy,' replied Fenella, with a curling lip, 'for letting his bankers know that I am left *en pénitence;* but I don't think I shall trouble them to honour my drafts at all.'

'My dear girl, what nonsense you are talking! How can you live without money?'

'I will *make* it!'

'*Fenella!*' cried Lady Marjoram, with unaffected horror.

She would have been less horrified if her sister-in-law had confided to her some tale of secret dishonour.

'Janie,' said Fenella, 'do you suppose that I am going to accept all the advantages which your brother's position and name and money can afford me, when he doesn't consider I am worthy to be his wife? He told me so when we parted. He repeats his opinion in the letter I have received from him to-day. He is going to show the whole world that he thinks so, by leaving me to live alone and in disgrace at Conroy Castle. But he will find that I have too much pride to accept his conditions. If I am not fit to be Lady Conroy, I will take none of the advantages that accrue to me from bearing the name.

I will take my child and my servant away from Scotland, and support them with the labour of my hands, sooner than accept one farthing from a man who openly insults and deserts me.'

'But, Fenella, it is *impossible*—you cannot do such a thing,' exclaimed the Countess. 'Fancy what the world would say at such an act on your part. It could put but one construction on it; it would never believe that you had gone alone.'

'"The world" must believe what it likes,' said Fenella. 'Your brother was the proper person to think of that, Janie.'

'But the child, my dear girl! Bertie will never let you take the child away with you, and I am quite sure you will be miserable if you part with Valeria.'

'He will put no opposition in the way of my taking the child,' replied Lady Conroy quietly.

'Fenella, you naughty girl! tell me the truth,' cried Lady Marjoram. "Is it anything with reference to the child that

has caused this terrible affair between you?'

'If it were, you are the last person who should speak of it jestingly,' returned Lady Conroy, and her sister-in-law could get no more out of her than that.

She attempted to give her some information respecting the arrangements Sir Gilbert had made for her comfort and welfare, but Fenella refused to receive it from her hands. If her husband, she said, could confide such a duty to a third party, it deteriorated to an insult. So Lady Marjoram, finding it impossible to get at the truth of the matter, took her departure, with the intention of trying to see her brother again, and informing him of his wife's refusal to live at Conroy Castle. But she was too late. A note, which she found awaiting her at home, contained the news of his departure for Italy, where (as Sir Gilbert said) he intended enjoying himself, until such time as he had made arrangements for returning to Sovooranooko. But he gave

no address, so his sister was unable to communicate with him. A fortnight later, she wrote to Fenella :—

'All hope for the present is over. I received a telegram from Bertie this morning, to say he was just about to embark at Brindisi for the Gold Coast, and I shall not hear from him again until he has arrived there. By this time he must be on the sea. But I entreat of you to be patient, and take up your residence quietly at Conroy Castle, until I shall have had time to write to him and receive a reply. Surely you cannot remain obdurate. Now that you see my brother is determined to have his own way, you will give up yours. Whatever has been the cause of your separation, it must not go any farther, for the sake of the family, and the scandal which publicity will entail.'

When Fenella received this letter, she was still in Portman Square. The season was yet at its height, but she had remained persistently at home, preparing for the step

which she felt sure she should find it necessary to take. She had sent for Bennett and Valeria from Scotland, and passed most of her time with the little child who would thenceforth be her only companion. But she did not confide the real reason of her husband's absence to the servant. She hoped that he might yet think better of his determination and return to her, and until he made the matter patent to the world by leaving England, she considered it was her duty to be silent. But when she received Lady Marjoram's letter announcing his departure, Fenella felt that her time for action had arrived. She could not remain in Portman Square. The house was already in the agents' hands for letting, and she refused to be banished to Conroy Castle. She was obliged to call her faithful old nurse to her side and tell her the truth.

'Bennett dear, Sir Gilbert and I have parted for ever. We are never going to live together again.'

'Miss Fenella, you don't mean to go

to tell me such a thing?' cried Bennett, with uplifted hands. 'I knowed there was something up between you, but I never thought it could be as bad as that. And you seemed so sweet and lovin' together at the Castle! Deary, deary me! whatever's brought it about?'

'The cause is not of much consequence, is it, nurse,' said Fenella mournfully, 'so long as the fact remains? And it is a fact that I am going to leave Sir Gilbert's protection altogether, and take you and baby with me.'

'Miss Fenella dear, tell me the truth. Is that child at the bottom of this? Have you been telling Sir Gilbert that she ain't his own?'

'Yes, I have, Bennett. I know you will scold me, and it doesn't seem quite fair to you either, but I couldn't help it. The whole thing came out one day when I was in great distress, and Sir Gilbert pitied me, and I thought he would help me. But he was very, *very*

angry—just as you said he would be—and he declared my mother had never told him anything about it, and refused to live with me again unless I gave up my child. And that was impossible, you know, nurse; and so he has gone back to Africa, and we shall never meet again, I suppose, in this world.'

'Oh dear! oh dear!' cried the servant, 'it's all my fault. If I'd never gone and told you that that baby was alive, you'd have forgot all about the other by this time, and there'd have been a happy life before you. Oh, my dear lady, I shall never forgive myself. I have been the ruin of all your happiness.'

'Indeed, it is no such thing,' replied Lady Conroy kindly, as she laid her hand in that of the old woman; 'you have always been my best and truest friend, dear Bennett, and I shall never forget your kindness to me as long as I live. It was my mother who proved faithless to me in my extremity, and sent me, a liv-

ing lie, into Sir Gilbert's arms. It is no wonder he should resent such treachery.'

'But he would overlook it, my dear, if you sent that child away. And though it would go hard with you to do it, Miss Fenella (because I know what a mother's heart you have for the little creature), yet, you know, when it comes to husband, and title and lands in one scale, and a poor weak baby in the other, no one could blame you for choosing that as would do most good to yourself and others. *I'd* see she was well placed and well cared for, my dear. I'd even go with her myself (if it pleased you to think I looked after her), for I am sure, nothing I could do could compensate for the trouble I've brought on your head by telling you the story. Think better of it, Miss Fenella, and write and tell your good gentleman as you'll let the baby go.'

Fenella looked steadily into the old servant's eyes.

'Bennett, do you really think so badly

of me as that?' she said. '*You*, who know all! Do you think that, for the sake of my own comfort and reputation, I would cast *his* child upon the tender mercies of the world, to grow up perhaps unloved and unprotected (as I was), and left to fall into the same errors? No, nurse! I am not a religious girl—I never was. Somehow no one has ever seemed to care to ask (not even *him*) if I thought of religion or not. But I am not quite indifferent to the knowledge that I have sinned against God, and that if He sees fit to punish me for that sin to the end of my life, I must be patient. It would not make the burden easier to shift it on the shoulders of another. I could not accept pleasure and luxury—not even love (which my heart needs so sorely)—at the expense of my little child. God sent her to me, and no one but God shall take her away again. I can work for her or beg for her, but I will never part with her until my life's end.'

When Lady Conroy had finished her speech, Eliza Bennett was in tears.

'Where's the shoulders as ought to bear half the burden for you?' she exclaimed; 'why ain't that Mr Doyne here to see what you have suffered, and what you *do* suffer, and all on account of the trouble he brought upon you, the selfish creetur?'

'Don't be silly, dear nurse,' said Fenella, with an attempt at a smile; 'he is married, you know, and cannot be expected to remember what took place so long ago. Besides, did not you tell him my baby was dead?'

'Yes! I did. Heaven forgive me! But it was your poor mamma's orders, and I never disobeyed them to my knowledge. But it strikes me as you've seen him agen, Miss Fenella, and that all this fresh misfortune's been brought about by him as well?'

'I have seen him,' replied Lady Conroy, in a low voice; 'and I would have asked

him to help me in this matter, but he has forgotten all about me, nurse; he does not care for me any longer (perhaps he never *did* care really), and so the less we speak of him the better. He can never help me out of any trouble.'

'No! more likely to pull you in again, my dear. But did you tell him about Miss Valeria?'

'No; where would have been the use? Is it likely, when he does not love the mother, that he should take any interest in the child?'

'Has he got any others, Miss Fenella?'

'No, he has not.'

'And she's the very moral of him,' said the nurse, as she looked at the child that was playing on the floor.

'Yes, in person,' replied Lady Conroy; 'pray God she never may be in mind. The fact is, I tried to see him, nurse. I wrote to him twice to come and speak to me, but he refused. It is evident that he

is either afraid of his wife, or anxious that the past should be buried in oblivion. And in either case, I am too proud to intrude Valeria on his notice. He has done me all the harm he can, and the time is past for him to do me any good. Let me say to you now, then, dear nurse, what I said four years ago. Don't mention his name again to me.'

'I'd like to give him a bit of my mind all the same,' said Eliza Bennett. 'And now, my dear lady (if I don't make too bold), what do you mean to do for yourself?'

'I intend to leave England, Bennett, with Valeria and you (if you will come with us, dear), and go to Italy. I have a small sum of money, saved from my allowance—more than enough for us to begin housekeeping upon — and I shall set to work at once to earn more. I have spoken to some professional friends already on the subject, and procured some introductions that may be of service to

me. I am going to sing for my living, Bennett. I shall take my maiden name again; and if I can earn sufficient money by my voice for us three to live upon, I shall be quite content. Sir Gilbert would make me an allowance, if I would consent to take it; but I will not. I cannot accept his bounty when he refuses to give me with it the title of his wife.'

Naturally the servant tried all her arguments to persuade Fenella to abandon this purpose. It seemed a terrible thing to her that her young mistress should give up houses and fortune and friends, to exercise her talents for a livelihood—('*just like a common play-actor*,' as she said, with the ignorant insolence of her class)—and all for the sake of a child as '*was nobody's*.' But she completely failed in her mission. Fenella was not only resolute to carry out her intention, but forbade Bennett (on pain of dismissal) to mention the project to any one.

She left London with her nurse and child, as though she were starting on a trip of pleasure ; nor did she confide her destination even to Lady Marjoram. But when she had got as far as Paris, she wrote her sister-in-law a letter, thanking her for all her kindness, which ended with these words :—

'As Sir Gilbert Conroy has voluntarily elected you his ambassador in this painful matter, will you tell him that, since I find it impossible to accede to the conditions he imposed upon me, I have made up my mind to separate from him altogether ; and as he declines to live with me as my husband, I refuse to accept anything further at his hands? I am going to support myself and my child henceforward, and neither of us will ever trouble him again. Do not let him fear, however, that we shall bring any further disgrace on the family name of which he is so careful. I shall adopt that which my father left me, and

no one will ever learn from my lips that I have a claim to any other.'

The Countess was naturally very much distressed when she received this letter, but there was no remedy for it. Fenella was beyond her reach or control, and all she could do was to forward her message to Sovooranooko; being well inclined to believe the while (with the rest of her fashionable friends) that there must be something at the bottom of the mystery which they had best not try to fathom.

Captain Doyne, too, heard of Lady Conroy's rupture with her husband, and in a way he little expected. A few weeks after he had gone home to Ryelands, and but a few days before he had arranged (being utterly disgusted with what had taken place during his short stay in England) to return to India, an ill-written and ill-spelt letter, in a strange handwriting, was put into his hand. He read

the intelligence it contained with the utmost surprise.

'SIR,—I am the person as met you, three years ago come last February, at Ines-cedwyn, and told you as a certain child, which we both knowed of, had been born dead. Sir, I told you a lie, though it was by my mistress's orders I did so. That child is alive and well at the present time, and the very image of yourself. I should not have written to tell you this, sir, even now, only I know from what I have heard and seen, that you have sorely misjudged my young mistress's actions, and brought another heavy trouble upon her head. She wanted to see you lately, sir, to tell you that the little girl was alive, and that she had the care of it. I don't know what happened between you this time, but I know it has cruelly cut her up, and caused a quarrel and a separation from her husband, and all on account of the misfortune you brought

upon her. And may the Lord forgive you, sir! for I never can. And if you are happy in your own home, with wife and children, it's more than you deserve to be. And though it isn't right for sinful creatures to be wishing harm to one another, I can't help hoping as the thought of my young mistress turned out of her home, for the sake of the poor innocent as has got no father, may come back to you sometimes in the midst of your own pleasures, and make you repent of the misery you've caused them both.— I am, sir, your humble servant, ELIZA BENNETT.'





CHAPTER V.

A LAPSE OF TIME.

'The dead he would have forgotten; but this living woman of whom the world spoke, whom it crowned—this living woman he could not forget.'—*Ariadne.*

THE first feeling which Geoffrey Doyne experienced on reading Eliza Bennett's letter was one of anger, mingled with disbelief. He was angry that a servant should have presumed to meddle with his private affairs; angry that so important a piece of news should have been kept from him so long, and rather incredulous as to whether it were the truth—whether it might not be

a trap on the part of Fenella, or the nurse, to excite his sympathy or extract his coin. But a little consideration banished this idea. The letter contained no address, nor desire for a reply. It must have been written, therefore, with the simple intention of telling him that the child was alive.

Alive! — his child; their child *alive!* He could not believe it. He had been led for so many years to regard it as dead, that he had almost ceased to remember it had ever existed. And now to hear that it was alive! It placed Fenella in an entirely new light in his eyes. She was no longer only the love of his youth—she was the mother of his child; and that is a tie which no man worthy of the name can ever cease to acknowledge. It exalts a bad, low woman to a dignity she can gain by no other means. It raises a pure and loving one on a level with the Divine. She has become a creator—the creator of his second self.

And this intelligence had reached Geoffrey Doyne at the very moment when he and the mother of his child were parted for ever—when (with his own hand) he had dug a gulf between them which no future excuse nor explanation could bridge over. He had exposed her frailty to the eyes of another; he had lowered her before the woman who had usurped her rightful place; he had humiliated the creature who had loved him above all the world, and who had now become an outcast from her home for his sake.

Geoffrey Doyne did not question how the calamity had been brought about. That it had occurred was sufficient for him; that he was powerless to avert it, *more* than sufficient. When he thought of what had happened, and that an interview or a few kind words from him might have prevented it—when he remembered all that Fenella had suffered for him in the past, and how little he had ever done to alleviate the pain he had caused,

Geoffrey Doyne thirsted to leave England and all its miserable associations behind him, and try and forget them in the duties of his profession.

He dragged his wife back to India full six months before his leave had expired; and from the day he met and parted with her in his own house the name of Lady Conroy never passed his lips.

But Jessie knew that he had not forgotten. She possessed the lynx eyes of jealousy, and watched every look of her husband's face, and listened to every tone of his voice, to find out if she could detect any lingering regret for the failure of his early love.

But Captain Doyne's eyes and tongue told no tales. Yet, as the years went on, there were signs about him which spoke of a heart ill at ease. Children were born to him after his return to India; he gained several steps in his profession; his father died, and left him a substantial fortune; and yet the lines in his face grew deeper

and deeper, and his dark hair changed rapidly to grey.

Even the smiles of his infant children were a reproach to him. He was an affectionate man by nature, and under ordinary circumstances would have made a loving father, but when his little boys—all the picture of Jessie—ran after him, or climbed upon his knee, the vision of another child would rise before him—of a little fairy girl—'*the very image of himself*' (as Bennett had said)—who had no father, no home, whose mother was a wanderer upon the face of the earth, whose very name was a mystery to him — and he would thrust the chubby little hands to one side, and go away by himself in solitary wretchedness. Then he would sit for hours brooding over the irrevocable past—wondering if Fenella ever thought of him, and *what* she thought of him; wondering what the child was like—if she resembled her mother in the spring-tide of her youth, or if (as the nurse had

affirmed) she was a reproduction of himself :—

> 'Behold, my lords,
> Although the print be little, the whole matter
> And copy of the father—eye, nose, lip,
> The trick of his frown, his forehead ; nay, the valley,
> The pretty dimples of his chin and cheek ; his smiles,
> The very mould and frame of hand, nail, finger.'

His little daughter! It seemed to have come almost as a merited retribution that his wife had brought him only sons—he who had always (when he thought of children) so longed to have a daughter on whom to lavish his affection and spend his substance. And these boys—they were all very well, of course, and he was proud of them ; but he did not care to fondle them. They were not to him as a girl could have been—as the little nameless girl whom he pictured lying in Fenella's arms, with '*the very trick of his frown*' upon her pretty features. Men do so dearly love to have a child that resembles themselves in every particular.

But as the passing years went on,

Geoffrey Doyne did not remain entirely ignorant of Lady Conroy's whereabouts nor her proceedings. A chance revelation made him acquainted with the fact that she had changed her name again to Barrington, and was gaining her livelihood as a public singer; and having gained so much information, the rest was easy. He followed her career as an artiste from capital to capital and watched her upward progress, until she had made a name for herself which would live when she had passed away. He read that she had become a widow by the death of Sir Gilbert Conroy at Sovooranooko some three years after he had parted with her in London, but the circumstance seemed to make no difference to the labour of her life. He heard of her success, first on the concert platform, and then upon the operatic stage in London and Berlin and New York, and shuddered when he realised the temptations she must have to pass through, and from which he had resigned the power to shield her.

But he never could hear anything of his little daughter. The men whom he met fresh from England, and full of praises for Mrs Barrington's voice and acting, had naturally never heard nor seen anything of her child, and were of opinion that, if she had one, she was very wise to keep her in the background.

'A daughter, Doyne?' they would exclaim. 'Mrs Barrington can't have a daughter, unless she's quite a baby. Why, she doesn't look more than two or three and twenty herself.'

'She *has* a daughter, I can assure you,' he answered, with a sigh, 'a girl who must be thirteen or fourteen years old by this time.'

'Do you know her, Colonel?' said another man.

'I *used* to know her,' replied Colonel Doyne, 'some fourteen or fifteen years ago. Mrs Barrington must be thirty by this time.'

'By Jove! you don't mean to say so. She doesn't look it by a long way. She is one of the most charming and attractive

women in town, and the men swarm round her like flies. Have you ever heard that she was the wife of Sir Gilbert Conroy, the governor of some place on the Gold Coast? He died out there.'

'Yes, I have heard so.'

'Well, his cousin, Lord Laurence Grantham, is perfectly mad about her. They say at the club, they always know when Grantham has been refused again by Mrs Barrington, he drinks so many extra soda-and-brandies. But it tells well for her, you know, because (as people say) there couldn't have been anything *very* wrong about her leaving Conroy, or his cousin wouldn't want to make up to her.'

Colonel Doyne flared up in a moment.

'Who dares to say there was *anything* wrong?' he demanded.

'Well, it looked queer you know, Colonel. He left her or she left him (one of the two) in the very middle of the season, and she appeared in public almost directly afterwards under her

maiden name. And you say she has a daughter, too!'

'What of that?' demanded Geoffrey Doyne quickly.

'Don't you see if that child were a Conroy, it is very unlikely that Sir Gilbert would have permitted her to take it away, and drag it over the country whilst she was following her profession? Why, the Conroys are awful big wigs — connected with the Marjorams, and no end of swells. No, no! you may depend upon it there's something queer in it all — queerer than anybody knows, except the lady herself.'

'And yet you said just now that Lord Laurence Grantham was anxious to marry her?' observed Colonel Doyne drily.

'So he is; and most people say he is the proper person to marry her. He may know more about the little girl than you or I—eh, Colonel?'

But the Colonel did not seem to appreciate the joke. He turned away, with a knitted brow, which looked like ill-temper,

but was in reality pain ; and the man who had been talking to him told his brother officers that he had always heard Doyne was a '*tub-preacher*,' but he didn't think he was so strait-laced as to take offence at a common innuendo.

And whilst he was thus under condemnation, Geoffrey Doyne was suffering as acutely as he had ever done in the old days. The careless words of the young officer had sunk deep into his heart. *This* was what his love had done for Fenella Barrington—left her throughout life to be suspected, tracked down, and talked about. *This* was the legacy he had bequeathed her, in exchange for the unlimited faith she had placed in his honour upon the Ines-cedwyn sands.

Had Geoffrey Doyne been a careless man of the world, his conscience might have ceased to reproach him before this time ; had he loved the woman he had ruined, as little as she *thought* he did, he would have found a thousand excuses

for his own behaviour. But he was not careless, and his love for her had been the one love of his life. Weakness of character, instability of temperament, and fear of the world had contrived to make him outwardly faithless to her; but no other woman had ever taken her place in his heart. And his sense of religion, which had deepened with the passing years, had helped to keep up her memory rather than erase it.

Once upon a time this same religion, shadowy and undefined, had soured him towards his fellow-creatures. For, in reality, he loved gaiety and pleasure. He would have keenly enjoyed theatres and balls and races; he was formed by nature to mix with society, and be one of its brightest ornaments. But what he took to be the voice of Heaven forbid his making this world other than a miserable reformatory, in which he was to do penance for the sins which it had been ordained he should commit before he entered it.

And the foremost amongst these was his sin against Fenella. He had not had the courage to remedy that evil by a manly acknowledgment of wrong, but he had striven to expiate it by crying 'Peccavi' night after night upon his bended knees. That could not do Fenella much good, but it brought her image vividly before him, and he was conscious of an ever-increasing desire to meet her again and receive her pardon for the past.

His friends were puzzled to know why he did not return home and settle in England. By the death of his father he had become the possessor of a considerable fortune, which placed him above the necessity of work, and his four sons were now of an age to be educated at school.

Colonel Doyne could have told them the reason well enough had he chosen to do so. He shrunk from the idea of going home, as if an old wound had been freshly lacerated every time the subject was mentioned to him. *Home!* what *home* could

there be for him in the country which held Fenella and himself together, and yet apart? It was the fear of meeting her again, and finding that the work of years was undone in a moment, that made him hold back as long as he could from taking any decisive steps in the matter. The very yearning he felt to revisit the place in which she lived, made him loath to risk a repetition of the pain and disappointment he had experienced during his last sojourn there.

But at length circumstances compelled him to make up his mind on the subject. Jessie's health (which had never been strong from the beginning) failed altogether, and her doctors insisted upon an immediate removal. She thought that her husband would accompany her (and his first intention had been to do so), but at the last hour his courage failed, and he despatched her, with her four children and attendants, to England alone. His wife was not surprised when his ultimatum was made known to her. She had felt for years that they

were drifting farther and farther apart, and had become quite hopeless of his affection ever reviving. She had loved him in her jealous, *exigeante* way all her life, and the knowledge of his complete indifference was the foundation of her present illness. Her health would have been delicate under any circumstances, but it need not have culminated in disease had she not become so thoroughly convinced that Geoffrey would do just as well—if not better—without her. Even her love for her offspring succumbed to the influence of this jealous, despairing love for her husband. Her heart was not capable of a large affection, nor could it hold more than one at a time. It was narrow and bigoted and exacting, and would have made her jealous of a dog that took off Geoffrey's attention from herself. She was proud of her children only because they were *his;* but if he appeared proud or fond of them too, her blood curdled with apprehension, and she was ready to turn them all out of the room, lest they

should usurp his conversation or his ideas. She was almost thankful to have them with her on the voyage (although they were far too boisterous to make pleasant companions for a sick mother), since Geoffrey would not have the opportunity of growing more attached to them during her absence.

It was in this state of mind that Mrs Doyne, faded, fractious, and suffering, landed in England and took up her temporary residence at St Leonards. Her own family were by this time pretty well scattered. Her parents were dead; her sisters married, and settled in different parts of the country.

There was no house open to receive her and her four boisterous boys, and poor Jessie felt very friendless and alone as she dragged her weary steps to St Leonards, where an old Indian acquaintance had already taken up her quarters. This lady, Mrs Carbonnell, did all in her power to lighten the cares of the invalid.

She engaged her a comfortably-furnished house and good servants, and the attendance of the best doctor in the place. Nothing that money could procure was wanting to restore Mrs Doyne to health; but she lay on her sofa all day long, with tears standing in her eyes, and a photograph of her husband clasped in her hand. The medical man gave Mrs Carbonnell a very unfavourable report of her.

'Your friend has no energy to recover,' he said, 'and remedies lose half their effect when employed upon patients who have no faith in them. You must try and rouse her. Take her out on the pier all day, and to any amusements that may be going on in the evening. Her low spirits contribute considerably to the suffering which she endures.'

'You don't think her *seriously* ill, doctor?' observed Mrs Carbonnell.

The doctor looked grave.

'Yes, I do! From what I can make

out so far, I think she is labouring under an internal disease which is difficult of cure; but it is too early to give a decided opinion on the matter. When I see my way more clearly, I shall communicate with Colonel Doyne. Meanwhile, do your best to cheer her up. There is to be a nice concert at the rooms this evening—cannot you persuade her to accompany you there?'

'I will do my best,' said Mrs Carbonnell, and she kept her word; but she found Jessie very hard to move in any matter that was for her own good. She was one of those women who make up their minds to be miserable, and go in for it as a profession. She had alienated her husband's heart from her more by this means than by any other. On the present occasion she objected and wavered and argued until her friend was thoroughly sick of trying to persuade her to go to the concert, when Mrs Doyne suddenly turned round and de-

clared it was the very thing she should like best. She looked very old for her age, and somewhat ghastly, when she was attired for the evening, and Mrs Carbonnell thought she had never perceived the ravages of disease so plainly in her as she did then. But Jessie seemed quite lively, and determined to prove that her doctor was in the right when he ordered her to join in such amusements. The concert was expected to be an unusually good one, as several of the best Italian and English singers were coming down from London to appear at it. Mrs Carbonnell read over the names of the artists to Mrs Doyne, asking her with each one whether she had heard them sing before. At last she came to that of Mrs Barrington.

'I don't suppose you *can* have heard Mrs Barrington,' she said, 'for she only appeared in England about five years ago. She is such a fine-looking woman, and so fascinating. I have never seen

her on the stage, but I am told she is quite charming.'

'What is her husband?' asked Jessie indifferently. 'Does he sing too?'

'I never heard of him. I don't think she *has* a husband,' replied Mrs Carbonnell.

'You called her "*Mrs*" Barrington.'

'Yes; she *has* been married, I know, but that is not her real name. Oh, there is a most romantic story about her. She was the wife of some very big person—a duke or a marquis, I think—and he ran away from her, and left her to support herself on the stage. No! it couldn't have been that; she ran away from him perhaps. Any way, she *has* been a great lady, and knows lots of good people still. I am sure you will be delighted with her voice. I have heard judges say she is our finest English singer.'

Jessie was no musician herself—she hardly knew one note from another; but she was pleased and interested by what she heard that evening, until the time

arrived for Mrs Barrington to sing. There was a little stir and bustle in the concert-room when her turn came, for many there had seen her on the operatic stage, and were curious for an opportunity of examining her closer.

Fenella did not keep her audience waiting. There was no affectation about her; she stood on the platform almost as soon as the artist who preceded her had disappeared. She was clothed entirely in white, with ornaments of dead gold upon her neck and arms. Her fair hair was bound about her small head in a strictly classical fashion; her face was pale but clear, her expression serenely cheerful; she certainly did not look her age by five or six years.

'So strange, isn't it?' whispered Mrs Carbonnell as Fenella appeared. 'I am told that, off the stage, she never appears in colours. She always wears either black or white. There *must* be a mystery about her life, mustn't there, to make her habi-

tually wear mourning? But she is very charming, nevertheless. Hasn't she a sweet smile? Hush! she is going to begin.'

Mrs Doyne sat, throughout the song that followed, silent and absorbed. She could not take her eyes off the singer; she seemed perfectly fascinated by her appearance. But as soon as the plaudits were over, and Fenella had left the platform, Jessie turned hurriedly to her companion.

'*What* did you say her name used to be?'

'I cannot tell you—I have never heard; but I believe "*Barrington*" was her maiden name.'

Mrs Doyne's pale cheek became still paler under the shock of recognition.

'I don't feel well,' she gasped; 'I am afraid I can't sit it out. Will you assist me to leave the room?'

Mrs Carbonnell was alarmed at the change that had so suddenly taken place in her.

'You are indeed worse,' she said; 'the heat has been too much for you. We must return home at once.'

She conducted Mrs Doyne back to her own house and saw her settled for the night, but Jessie did not confide the reason of her illness to her friend.

She had recognised Fenella beyond all shadow of doubt, and the fact of seeing her had revived all the old misery, but hers was not a nature that found relief in confidence. She brooded over the circumstance in her own mind, and was thankful that Geoffrey had not been present, and fretted herself to imagine what he would have thought or felt had he been there; but she kept her fancies to herself, and they made her worse in consequence.

A few days after, however, as Mrs Carbonnell was walking beside her invalid chair on the esplanade, she pulled Jessie's sleeve, and directed her attention to two figures that were advancing towards them.

'Do you see that lady in black with the young girl just in front of us? *That* is Mrs Barrington and her daughter. My landlord tells me they are staying at St Leonards, at one of the hotels, and are on the beach every day. Take a good look at her as she goes by.'

But Jessie was afraid of recognition; and as Mrs Barrington came alongside of her, she turned her head the other way. There was no need of her alarm. She was so aged and altered that Fenella would hardly have known her again had she been told her name. As it was, she passed her as a perfect stranger, and was so occupied listening to Valeria's chatter that she never even raised her eyes towards her chair.

'Did you see her dress?' said Mrs Carbonnell, as soon as Fenella was out of hearing,—'black satin, covered with black lace. What sums those artists must make upon the stage! And the girl too! such a pretty creature, but quite a different

style from her mother. Dark brown hair and blue eyes, and very tall and slight. Well, I'm sure no one would take them for mother and daughter. They look much more like two sisters. And my landlord tells me that they both talk French and Italian like natives, and that Mrs Barrington says no motive on earth should ever induce her to allow her girl to go upon the stage. Strange, isn't it? and when she has made such a success herself; but I suppose she has enough money for both of them. You are tired, I can see, Mrs Doyne. Would you like to go in?'

'Yes, I am tired,' said Jessie wearily, and almost ready to cry. 'There is so much noise and glare and movement out here, it does me more harm than good.'

The sight of this woman, who had been Geoffrey's first love—who (the wife felt in her heart of hearts) was his love still—walking about, strong, handsome, and successful, whilst she had hardly strength

to drag herself in and out of her bath-chair, struck her with a fearful pang of jealousy, and from that time her residence in St Leonards became a torture to her. Each day when she went out, she gazed eagerly from side to side for a sight of Mrs Barrington, yet, when occasionally they came across one another, she had not the courage to look her in the face. But she thought of her day and night; her jealousy transforming Fenella into something far more beautiful and fascinating than she really was, and making her endure the agony of the condemned in picturing how, when she herself was dead and cold, her husband would return to his first love and be once more enslaved by her attractions. These miserable forebodings, confided to no one, but brooded on in the silent watches of the night, had such an effect upon Mrs Doyne that her disease made rapid progress, and her doctor considered it his duty to make her acquainted with the danger of her

condition, and to telegraph the news to her husband. Jessie did not appear to be shocked at the intelligence of her approaching death, but she was most anxious to leave St Leonards before Colonel Doyne arrived.

'I cannot bear this place,' she exclaimed fretfully; 'it has become hateful to me. You must let me go to the Isle of Wight, or abroad, or anywhere you may consider best for me.'

'I am sorry to refuse your request,' replied Dr Warren, 'but I cannot possibly allow you to be removed. You are in a very critical condition, and a railway journey might prove your death.'

'Doctor, doctor! pray let me go? I cannot tell you the reason, but it is this place that is killing me.'

'That is all fancy, Mrs Doyne. I know of no temperature that would suit your complaint like that of St Leonards, and if you insist upon leaving it, I cannot guarantee that you will see your husband

again. Come, now! I am sure you will be reasonable. Think what a terrible disappointment it would be to Colonel Doyne and yourself if circumstances prevented your meeting.'

Jessie was silent. Her one intense desire was to live to see Geoffrey, and extract a promise from him. If it could only be compassed by her remaining at St Leonards, at St Leonards she must remain. Only, he must not—he should not—meet that woman again. She lay back on her pillow, white and exhausted.

'How long will it be before he can come to me?' she demanded.

'He will receive my telegram to-day, and I hope that another month may see him by your side. But you must be patient, Mrs Doyne, and follow out my instructions faithfully. Then (who knows?) we may have you walking about again by the time Colonel Doyne arrives.'

Dr Warren knew perfectly well that the probability was that she would be under

ground before her husband could reach England, but it was his part to keep up her spirits as much as possible. He had a harder task before him, however, than he had anticipated. Jessie could not drive the thought of Fenella from her mind, and her prevailing idea became, how she could best induce the singer to leave St Leonards before Geoffrey appeared upon the scene. Mrs Carbonnell, who visited her every day, was subjected to the most eager inquiries concerning everything Mrs Barrington said or did; and not knowing the vital interest Mrs Doyne had in the matter, she gave her all the information she could glean freely.

'Is she likely to leave St Leonards, my dear?' she replied one day, in answer to a question from Jessie. 'I should t' ink not. My landlord tells me she has taken a little cottage between this and Hastings for the summer—such a sweet little place, all roses and honeysuckle; but, of course, she can't live there, as

she is engaged for the English Opera in London this season. I suppose it is for the sake of her little girl, who seems to be growing fast (she is almost as tall as her mother), and that Mrs Barrington will leave her here with the old nurse, whilst she is in town. From all I gather, I should think there was no probability of her leaving St Leonards, at all events, for the present.'

'Do people speak well of her?' asked Mrs Doyne. 'I mean, is she a kind-hearted, generous sort of woman?'

'I believe so—*very*. I am told her kindness to the sick and the poor is unprecedented, and that she has only to hear of a tale of sorrow to try and relieve it. But she looks like that, doesn't she? She has such a frank, serious, benevolent face, as if she had known trouble herself, and could sympathise with it. For my own part, I feel as if I could trust her to the very end. But then I have always been very partial to Mrs Barring-

ton. My friends laugh at me, and say I am quite in love with her.'

Mrs Doyne did not make any remark upon her friend's eulogium, but she pondered on it for many hours after she had left her, and the result was that she made up her mind to write to Fenella. It was a bold stroke, but it was a desperate one. She would write to this woman (of whom she was so terribly afraid), and ask her to come and see her. If she were really so kind to the sick and suffering as Mrs Carbonnell had been led to believe, perhaps she would not refuse the request of a dying woman, even though she had offended her. And then she would tell her the history of her blighted life, and appeal to her generosity to avoid a meeting with Colonel Doyne. Had Jessie allowed herself time to think over this project, her courage would probably have given way; but as soon as she had decided, she put it into execution. She

told her nurse to bring her pen and paper, and wrote to Fenella as follows:—

'DEAR MADAM,—You will be surprised to receive this note from one whose last meeting with you was productive of so much unpleasantness. But I am alone, very ill, and unlikely to recover. Will you overlook the past, and come and see me? I have something of importance to say to you.—Believe me, yours sincerely,

'JESSIE DOYNE.'

Fenella's surprise at receiving this letter was unmitigated, and her first impulse was to send Mrs Doyne a polite refusal. But further consideration brought into play the true womanly kindness of her character. After all, the insults which had so deeply wounded her had taken place ten years before. Ten years is a long time to harbour resentment, even for an intentional injury, and the wife had not been nearly so much to blame as the husband. Be-

sides, she was ill—dying! That of itself was sufficient in Fenella's eyes to wipe out all past offences. So she decided to go and see her; but her reply to Jessie's note was characteristic :—

'DEAR MADAM,—Since you *are* alone, and desire to see me, I shall have pleasure in complying with your request, and will call upon you to-morrow afternoon at three o'clock.—Yours faithfully,

'FENELLA BARRINGTON.'

By the time the hour for the appointed interview had arrived, Jessie had worked herself up to a state of nervous excitement that was alarming. But she would not hear of postponing the expected visit, and she took care, by banishing nurses, children, and attendants, to provide against any interruption to her conversation with Mrs Barrington.

Fenella was punctual to her time, and entered the room with a serious but

friendly countenance. But her first view of Mrs Doyne put every thought but that of pity out of her head. She had not been prepared for so great a change. It shocked her exceedingly, and she advanced to the sofa with eyes brimful of concern.

'You didn't expect to see me so altered, did you?' asked Jessie, with a ghastly smile; 'but it is the truth that I shall not be here long. My doctor says I have but a few months at the outside to live. Had it not been so, I should hardly have asked for this interview.'

'You distress me, Mrs Doyne, beyond measure,' replied Fenella. 'Under any circumstances (if I can be of use to you), I hope you do not think so badly of me as to disbelieve in the willingness of my service. What—what—happened so long ago,' she added, with a slight catch in her breath, 'we may well afford to look over now. And after all, it was not you and I that wronged each other most.'

'No! I have thought a great deal of it since I have lain here, and that, if you heard my story and what I have suffered in my turn, you might feel I was to be pitied almost as much as you are.'

'Do you think there is any need to distress yourself by relating it?' asked Fenella gently. 'I can see that you are very ill, and excitement cannot fail to make you worse. I can well understand that you have had a great deal to bear in your married life, and believe me that the past has lost its sting for me, and I would not have it altered now if I could.'

'Let me speak,' replied Jessie earnestly. 'I have a request to make to you, and I cannot do it without some previous explanation. My mind will be more at ease when I have told you all.'

'Do just as you please, Mrs Doyne, and if you *must* speak, speak freely. Do not be in the least afraid of wounding me by anything you may say. I have lived the old life down.'

'Have you ceased to love him?' demanded Jessie eagerly.

Fenella bit her lip. She had a hard struggle between truth and expediency. But the ruling passion conquered.

'I have *not* ceased to love him,' she replied, 'but I have ceased to regret that my love was misplaced. Now, you see that you may speak to me in all confidence.'

'I loved him from the first day we met,' said Jessie, clasping her hands, 'and I had no idea (not the least in the world) but that he loved me as much I did him. He has told me since our marriage that my mother forced him into it against his will, and that he never had any intention of proposing to me; but it was not *my* fault, Mrs Barrington—indeed, it was not. I was only an ignorant girl. I had no idea that he could have any motive but one in asking me to marry him.'

I can quite believe that it was not your fault,' said Fenella.

'Then came our separation. Geoffrey went abroad, and came home, and went to Lynwern, without even seeing me; and from Lynwern he wrote me that cruel letter to say he cared no longer for me, and we had better break off our engagement. Don't you think it *was* cruel, Mrs Barrington? — to *me*, who loved him so dearly, and was only looking forward to the day when we should be married.'

'I think it *was* cruel. I think he was cruel to both of us,' replied Fenella.

'He nearly broke my heart,' sobbed Jessie; 'but I sent him back all his letters and presents, and tried to believe it had only been a happy dream, and it was over. But papa and mamma saw I was miserable, and found out the truth, and they were exceedingly angry, and sent for Geoffrey to come and speak to them and explain his conduct. And then—then he asked me to marry him over again; and I said, "Yes."'

'Didn't he tell you about *me?*' de-

manded Fenella, with open eyes; 'didn't he say he had solemnly pledged his faith to some one else?'

'He *did* say something about being in love with another woman, but mamma told me that was all nonsense, and it was only a barmaid, or somebody he couldn't marry, and I should save him from disgrace by keeping him to his engagement. And then, remember I *loved him*, Mrs Barrington (as much, perhaps in my way, as you did), and I thought when we were married he would be sure to love me.'

'Yes, I understand all that,' replied Fenella; 'but why should you tell me this, Mrs Doyne? You are his wife—he is yours beyond all recall. Why cannot you be contented with the fact? Why should you rake up memories that are painful to both of us?'

'Because he is *not* mine, Mrs Barrington, and he never has been. From the first day of our marriage his heart has been yours, and it will be so to the day of his

death. You are the one great passion of his life; and I—I am *nothing* to him.'

'I think your love for your husband makes you see things in an exaggerated light,' replied Fenella calmly. 'The cruel exposure of my weakness for him, which Colonel Doyne confessed to on the occasion of our last meeting, does not look as if he had much affection (or even consideration) left for myself.'

'But I want to tell you how that came about,' cried Jessie. 'He would never have told me the secret had I not forced him to do so. But I had found out something of it, Mrs Barrington, from Geoffrey's manner at meeting you again, and my mother's suspicions, and various other little things, and I threatened to expose you myself unless he told me the truth. I threatened to write to your husband, Sir Gilbert Conroy, and to all your relations, if he kept any part of the affair from me.'

Fenella's breast heaved with silent indignation. Under any circumstances, *this*

was a proceeding to which she could never have been a party. She would have died first. But all she said was,—

'And Geoffrey (I mean Colonel Doyne) was base enough to tell you?'

'Mrs Barrington, what else could he have done? Indeed, it was more my fault than his! I lost all control of myself, and I dared him to tell me a lie. What *could* he have done?'

'*What could he have done?*' repeated Fenella scornfully. 'He could have been *silent!* A man should cut his tongue out sooner than betray the woman who trusts in him. But let it pass, Mrs Doyne. Please say no more about it. It was that piece of treachery on the part of your husband that led to the separation with mine. I have no patience to discuss the subject.'

'But don't be angry with him,' urged Jessie, 'for I am sure he did it for the best. He saw how I loved him, and he felt he owed a duty to me as well as to

you. But he was very miserable when he had done it, and I don't believe he has had a happy moment since.'

'This is a very strange interview,' said Fenella, 'and I hardly know to what good it can lead. But since you have been so open with me, Mrs Doyne, I will be equally so with you, for I owe it to myself that (knowing so much) you should know all. I met Geoffrey (as you did), and loved him from the first hour of our meeting. He was more to me than he can ever have been to you. I was very young at the time—very friendless, and quite unprotected—and his love came to me like a revelation from heaven. He was my god! I worshipped the very ground he trod on. I believed that nothing so good, so beautiful, or so true as himself had ever existed in this world before—and I would have laid down my life for his sake. I did more, as he was good enough to inform you. I gave up into his hands my reputation, my honour, all my hopes of happiness, perhaps

(who knows?) of heaven! And after that —*he left me!*'

There was silence between the two women for a few moments—a silence that was broken only by Jessie's sobs.

'Don't cry,' said Fenella tenderly. 'It is not worth crying for now. We have both loved him, and he has deceived us both. That is all. For his sake, the less we say about it the better.'

'Oh, he has wronged us bitterly—bitterly,' wailed Mrs Doyne.

'And you, poor child, perhaps the most of the two; for I, at least, am not bound to him.'

'But you have his heart! He has never really cared for any woman but yourself. If he sinned in deserting you, you have been amply avenged.'

'I am sorry to hear it,' said Fenella, 'for I have no wish to remember, nor to be remembered by him. He has blighted my life from first to last. He has done me as great an injury as it is

possible for man to do to woman. Whilst I *remember*, I do not see how I can forgive. And since he *was* dear to me, my greatest desire is to forget.'

'But *he* has not forgotten *you!*' cried Jessie. 'For years he has not mentioned your name to me, but I have heard him murmur it in his sleep, as though he were praying for you or for himself. He is not a happy man, Mrs Barrington. Even his children seem to be no pleasure to him. And as for myself, we have almost become strangers.'

'Why should he visit the effects of his own wrong-doing upon you?' exclaimed Fenella angrily. 'Why are we *both* to suffer because he was too weak to know his own mind? You cruelly insulted me when we last met, Mrs Doyne, but could you have read my heart, you would have seen that I was innocent of all intentions against the peace of yours. I *did* wish to speak to your husband upon a matter which, even now, I cannot reveal to you.

But you may rest assured that it was one which had no reference to our former love. That you should have suspected that I could be so dishonourable as to wish to intrigue with another woman's husband was the greater insult of the two.'

'You must forgive me for that as for the other,' said Mrs Doyne, 'for I was mad, and hardly knew what I was about. But now that you have said so much, I feel that you will accede to the request I am about to make to you. Cannot you guess what it is? He will be here soon. They telegraphed for him last week. I am dying, and I want to see him once more. Would you place any obstacle to my dying in peace?'

'No, no; surely not! what can you mean?' said Fenella.

'That if you remain in St Leonards, Geoffrey will not fail to see you, and my last days will be embittered by the same jealous pangs that have tortured me before. It is of no use shaking your head,

for I know I am correct, and I would have left the place myself if Dr Warren would have permitted me to move. But I cannot—I am dying. Will you go instead, and leave me in peace?'

'When do you expect Colonel Doyne to arrive?' said Fenella.

'In three or four weeks at latest—perhaps sooner. Will you go?'

'*Of course* I will go! Do you think I would remain after what you have told me? Mrs Doyne, I am not an ungenerous woman, and had you confided in me long ago, much of our mutual misery might have been avoided. I had nearly concluded a bargain for a little cottage here, but I shall give up all thoughts of it, and move elsewhere. Don't make your mind uneasy on that score. Before a week is over your head, I shall have left St Leonards. Believe me, I have as little desire to meet Colonel Doyne as probably he has to see me.'

'You are a good woman,' said Jessie

feebly, 'and I don't wonder that he loves you. And—and—I suppose—'

'What do you suppose?' demanded Fenella, perceiving her hesitation.'

'That—when I am—I am—*dead*, he will find you out again, and—and—'

Fenella regarded the sick woman with tender, serious eyes.

'Dear Mrs Doyne,' she said, 'is that the right way for you to speak to me?'

'Oh no, no! but you cannot tell how my heart is torn with jealousy of him. It has been the bane of my life. It has eaten up every pleasure I might have had in it. Oh, promise me—*do* promise me,' she continued excitedly, 'that if—if—anything happens to me, and you meet Geoffrey again, you will never marry him.'

But Fenella refused to make a rash promise that she might afterwards regret, for the sake of quieting a sick woman's fancies. With *her*, courage to speak the truth always outstripped any other feeling.

'I don't think I should be right to give you such a promise,' she answered gravely, 'because it is only God who can read and direct our future. But I think it is very, *very* improbable that I should ever do so, or that Colonel Doyne should propose such a thing. You forget that circumstances are altered for both of us. I am a professional singer, who has been openly disgraced by the desertion of her late husband—not at all the sort of woman that Geoffrey Doyne, with his pride of birth and strict notions of religion, would be likely to make his wife; whilst *he* is (in my eyes) an unsexed and dishonoured man. I do not think, therefore, that you need make your mind uneasy on that score.'

'But you will not *promise* me?' said Jessie.

'I think it would be foolish to promise, Mrs Doyne; but I can assure you so far, that whilst your husband and I remain *as we are* in thought and feeling, there is no

probability of our ever meeting—far less of our becoming friends again. Let that assurance content you, and be at peace.'

'I can never be at peace until I am in the grave,' she wailed; 'but I will try and believe what you say. And I should like you to—to—kiss me before you go, in token of your forgiveness, for we may never meet again.'

Fenella stooped down and took the wasted form of Geoffrey Doyne's wife in her arms.

'May God Almighty bless you,' she said, 'and give you rest. The day *must* come when we shall all meet in another world, and these terrible heartburnings and jealousies will be purged away for ever. Till then, try and think kindly of me—as of one who crossed your path unwillingly, and wounded herself most sorely in doing so. And when we are reunited, it will be in perfect peace.'

'I wish you had been my friend, long, long ago,' said Jessie, weeping. 'I think

Geoffrey would have been kinder to me if it had been so.'

'It is too late to lament that now,' replied Fenella; 'but we will think of each other as friends in the future. Good-bye then, dear friend,' she continued, kissing her, 'and may we forgive all who have injured us, as we hope to be forgiven.'

Mrs Doyne clung to her for a few minutes, crying feebly, and then Fenella summoned her nurses to her, and laying her gently back upon her pillow, left the room. The interview had been a very trying one to her, and she felt much shaken by it; but it was the last. A few days after, as she was making preparations, according to her promise, for leaving St Leonards, she heard the death-bell tolling, and Valeria came in from a walk with Bennett, brimful of news.

'Mother dear!' she exclaimed (Fenella would not have missed that sweet sound of '*Mother dear!*' for all the possessions

this earth could afford her), 'did you hear the bell tolling? It's for a poor lady in Rothesay Villas—a Mrs Doyne—and her husband is in India; and she has left four little boys behind her. Isn't it sad?'

'*Mrs Doyne!*' exclaimed Fenella, suddenly turning pale. 'Surely not *Mrs Doyne?*'

'Yes, it is, ma'am,' replied Bennett, with a look of significance. 'The name caught my ear directly; but I don't suppose as it's any relation?'

'Yes, it is; she is his wife,' said Fenella faintly. 'And it is very sudden—very sudden indeed.'

Eliza Bennett (now an old woman of sixty, with white hair) regarded her mistress steadily for a minute, and then, with a loud sniff of disapprobation, left the room. Her devotion to Fenella and her child was as great as ever; and to this day she could not hear any allusion to Geoffrey Doyne without expressing her indignation.

Valeria saw the tears standing in her mother's eyes.

'Did you know this poor lady, mother dear?' she asked.

'Yes, darling, I did—not very well, but quite enough to make me sorry she has gone so soon. I wish her husband had been with her at the last. She longed so much to see him again.'

'Who is her husband, mother dear?'

'Colonel Doyne.'

'Did you know him too?'

'Yes—a little—long ago.'

'Was he nice?'

'Rather, Val.' But as the qualified praise left her lips, Fenella's heart smote her with deception; and she caught her child in her arms, and kissed her fondly upon brow and eye and lip.

Valeria loved her mother ardently, and returned her caresses with equal warmth.

'Why do you love me so, mother dear?' she whispered, as they clung together.

'I love you for your own sake, my

sweet — and — for your father's; and I can't help thinking of those four poor little boys left in Rothesay Villa without a mother, and wondering if they will be well cared for and looked after.'

'Oh yes, they are sure to be!' exclaimed Valeria; 'for Bennett says that Mrs Doyne was quite a rich lady, and had two nurses and a governess to walk out with the children.'

'Of course! How foolish I am!' said Fenella, drying her eyes. 'There must be any number of people to take her place. Come, Val dear, and help me with my packing. We go on to Brighton to-morrow morning.'

She had decided upon spending the few weeks she could call her own, before the London season commenced, at Brighton, and passed them very quietly and happily in the company of her child.

But something that occurred before she left the place greatly upset her. It was only a letter that had been forwarded by

the postal authorities from her late address at St Leonards; but she recognised the writing at once, and her hand shook so much that she could hardly open it. She knew it came from Geoffrey Doyne. She could not mistake the bold, free hand that that had so often made her heart leap with expectant pleasure, nor the monogram 'G. D.,' which he invariably placed in the corner of the envelope.

Why—*why* was she so weak, she asked herself (with a sickening foreboding of trouble), that the mere handwriting of one she so thoroughly despised had the power to move her thus? She hated herself for her want of self-command and courage, as she tore the letter open to see what Colonel Doyne could possibly have to say to her after these many years of silence and of separation.

'Rothesay Villa, St Leonards-on-Sea,
15*th April* —.

'My dear Fenella,—I hardly know

how to write to you, but an irrepressible longing for some communication between us forces me to take up my pen. I am (as you will see) once more in England. I arrived here a fortnight after my poor wife had been laid in her grave. The sad news with which I was greeted was (as you may suppose) a terrible shock to me; but a long and unhappy life has taught me how to bow to the will of Heaven, and where to find consolation under its most harrowing dispensations. I am thankful to find that my poor Jessie had the comfort of Mrs Carbonnell's presence and attention to the very last, and I hear from that lady that *you* also were good enough to visit her and be her friend. How am I to thank you sufficiently for such a graceful act upon your part, and which (my heart whispers) was done for my unworthy sake. Fenella! I know that much that has occurred in the past must appear, not only hard, but inexplicable to you;

but hitherto my tongue has been tied by a sense of duty. Now, however, that the merciful interposition of an all-seeing Providence permits us once more to see and speak to each other without sin, may I hope that you will prove my friend as you have been hers, and let me try and explain all that may have appeared strange to you? I shall not remain in this place long. It holds too many sad memories for me. I intend, therefore, to leave my children here, under the charge of their governess, and take up my quarters in town. I find that you have left St Leonards, but they assure me this letter will be safely forwarded to you. Let me hear from you soon. I shall be so anxious until I receive an answer—so anxious to learn what your heart still says to you of me. Believe me, that I have never forgotten you, nor the days when we first met. There are some things it is impossible to forget, and I have never ceased to think

of, nor to pray for you. May that merciful Heaven who overrules all things for our good, and can turn our days of mourning into joy, grant us the consolation of each other's friendship for all that we have lost.—Believe me, ever yours faithfully,

'GEOFFREY DOYNE.'

By the time she had concluded this letter, all Fenella's nervous trepidation had ceased. As she perused it line after line, her eyes flashed and her lip curled. When she reached the signature, she crushed the paper up in her hands, and said a word between her teeth that sounded very like "*humbug*."'

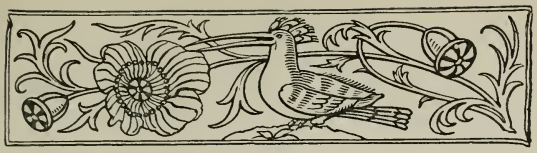
Had Geoffrey Doyne written to her, without an allusion to Providence or the past, he might have touched a chord in the heart which was still faithfully his own; but this mixture of love and religion, this offer of renewed friendship over the clods of his wife's grave, grated

on Fenella's sense of decency and justice and truth. It is not too much to say that it revolted her, and she sincerely wished she had never received the letter. But otherwise it made little difference in her life.

It is true that she cried over Valeria's sleeping form that night, and as she knelt to say her prayers beside it, she asked God not to let her child's father sink lower in her estimation than he had already done; but that was all. The letter was thrown into the fire, and Colonel Doyne never received an answer to it—which at first he thought strange, and then he huffed at, and finally made himself miserable over. And shortly afterwards the London season commenced, and he went up to town; and though it was too soon after his wife's death for him to mix in any gaiety, he wandered through the streets, and met placards and hoardings at every turn with Fenella's name flaring from them

in gigantic letters of red and green and blue. He grew restless and uneasy under the constant irritation they afforded him, until one night he felt as if he could bear it no longer, and, creeping into an obscure part of the opera house, devoured her face and figure through his *lorgnettes* for two whole hours, and staggered out into the fresh air again, faint and dizzy, and feeling as if he had never loved her so much as at that moment in all his life before. The indifference Fenella had shown towards renewing their acquaintance had quickened his torpid love into action again.

'Since men are faithful only to the faithless, what is true to them, they can easily forsake.' He had neglected her when his falsehood had nearly caused her death. It should be his Nemesis to remember, when Fenella had apparently acquired the happy art of forgetting.



CHAPTER VI.

DRIFTED APART.

'There are women like that; they make us dread lest there should be the endless hereafter that wise men laugh at. How should we bear their eyes?'—*Ariadne.*

'If the sense is hard
To alien ears, I did not speak to these—
No! not to thee, *but to thyself in me.*'—*Tennyson.*

IT was a sultry afternoon at the close of the season, which had been a long and successful one, and Fenella was sitting in the drawing-room of her house in Kensington, with all the windows open, trying to catch a breath of fresh air as it blew across the gardens. At a little distance from her was seated Lord Laurence Grantham, playing with the ornaments on the table, and looking

as if he were about to propose for the fiftieth time. The light-hearted, scatter-brained youth, who had accompanied Sir Gilbert Conroy to Sovooranooko, had developed into a very handsome and substantial-looking man by this time, who would have been light-hearted still, if Fenella would only have had compassion on him, and rewarded the faithful attachment which he had borne her for the last ten years. But she would not. She treated him as a brother and familiar friend, but she refused to listen to any proposals of a tenderer nature. And the provoking part of it to Lord Laurence was, that he had never yet been able to understand her real reason for declining his repeated offers.

'Are you going to drive this afternoon, Fenella?' he asked presently.

'No; I have sent Valeria in the carriage instead. I am really too tired to go out. I shall have no voice this evening if I fatigue myself further.'

'By Jove! I don't wonder at your being tired. You outdid yourself last night, Fenella. I don't think I ever heard you sing so splendidly before.'

'I am glad of that; but I did not know you were in the house. Something must have inspired me; I felt lifted out of myself, and I knew I was doing better than usual. And His Royal Highness came behind afterwards, and complimented me personally. I felt so proud!'

'You should be looking elated to-day after such a triumph, instead of depressed. Has anything occurred to vex you, Fenella?'

'Nothing in particular. But have you forgotten that it is the anniversary of poor Sir Gilbert's death? He died seven years ago to-day. I felt his loss, Laurence, more than I let people know. I had always hoped (up to that period) that he would some day come back and forgive me.'

'Forgive you *for what?* Fenella, I

have never understood the rights of that story. What on earth made you and Conroy separate? Won't you tell me, now?'

'No, Laurence, I cannot. It concerned the welfare of another person, and my lips must be closed on the subject until my dying day.'

'It was deuced hard on you,' said Lord Laurence.'

'Perhaps it was—a little; but not so hard as my friends thought. At any rate, *you* know there was no crime mixed up with it.'

'Yes, I am sure of that—and I have proved it to you, haven't I? But I think you were very foolish, Fenella—not to say wrong, under the circumstances—to refuse the annuity which Gilbert bequeathed to you.'

'I did not require it, Laurence, and was happier without it.'

'But you should have taken it all the same—it was your right; and your re-

fusal made people talk the more. And if you did not require the money for yourself, you might have laid it by for the use of Valeria, whose name Gilbert so unaccountably left out of his will.'

'Do you not think,' said Fenella, 'that, if he had wished it to be so, my husband would have bequeathed the money to Valeria herself?'

'I don't know, I'm sure. I think he must have been mad when he made that will. It is a shame to think of that common-looking brute, William Conroy, having the title and the estates and the money and everything, whilst you are toiling on the stage for a livelihood.'

'And getting compliments from a prince of the blood royal,' laughed Fenella. 'Depend upon it, Laurence, I am much the better off of the two, and if Gilbert had but left one word of forgiveness behind him, I should have valued it more than fifty fortunes.'

'But, my dear girl, you don't consider

how scandalous people are, nor what they say about it all.'

'They cannot think nor say anything *very* bad, Laurence, whilst Lady Marjoram continues the firm friend she is to me now, and takes Valeria about everywhere with her own children.'

'Ah! Janie's a brick, isn't she? and she loves you like a sister. She would take you off the stage to-morrow if you would consent to live with her. I have heard her say so, over and over again.'

'Yes; you are all a great deal too good to me, Laurence, and I suppose I am an ungrateful wretch not to be able to respond better to your kindness. But I love my liberty and my labour, and I don't want to give up either, at all events, yet awhile.'

'I wish there was the remotest chance of *my* being able to persuade you to give them up,' grumbled Lord Laurence; 'but I believe you are made of adamant. Where do you go when the season closes?'

'To the Engaldine with the Marjorams! Didn't you know that? We shall be a delightful party. Only Janie and her two eldest boys, and Valeria and me. *Do* join us, Laurence! It will be twice as much fun if you are there.'

'Fun for you and death for me, after the manner of the frog in the fable,' he answered half jestingly. 'Haven't you tortured me enough already, Fenella, that you should wish to finish me off in the Engaldine?'

'Now, dear Laurence, *do* be reasonable,' she pleaded. 'Why am I to be deprived of the pleasure of your friendship because I cannot be your wife? You know how fond I am of you—how truly I appreciate your kindness to me and Valeria! Why can't you make up your mind to the inevitable, and let us enjoy each other's company as much as we can? You spoil everything for me by these constant allusions.'

'Because I won't believe it *is* inevitable,

Fenella, and I shall go on trying to make you change your mind until it is so. You say you like me, and I think you do. Why, then, should I be so objectionable to you as a husband? You may be sure I should let you do pretty well as you liked, and we are both past the age of romance! Then—I am well off, and I can place you in a good position, above all this petty talk and scandal that worries us both like the sting of gadflies, and above the reach of want; and even if you made a point of continuing before the public for the next few years, you should do it, sooner than I would give up the hope of winning you. You know that it would be for your own good, and that I've asked you already about a hundred times! Why can't you say "*yes*" at once and finish the matter?'

'Because I love you too well to say "*yes*," Laurence,' replied Fenella seriously.

'Oh, that's nonsense, you know, Fen-

ella! I've told you over and over again that I shall never be a happy man with any other woman, and if you'll give me as much love as you feel for me at this moment, it's all I require.'

Fenella was silent for awhile, thinking deeply. *What* was there, after all, to hinder her from accepting the love Lord Laurence offered her? — a love which she knew from experience to be true and honest and faithful. He was able (as he had affirmed) to place her in the position she had voluntarily forfeited, and to raise her above the suspicion of the world. And she was so fond of him, and grateful to him for his trust and fidelity, that she would have found it easy to let her fondness merge into the love and duty of a wife. Yet she could not find it in her heart to answer "*yes*."'

Lord Laurence resumed his pleading.

'I believe I have loved you ever since I first saw you at Conroy Castle, Fenella, with little Valeria in your arms. And I

need not tell you, I hope, that your child will never feel the want of a father if you will give me the right to fill poor Gilbert's place to her?'

'No!' said Fenella, suddenly starting from her reverie. 'No, Laurence; it is impossible! Don't torture me with any more entreaties. Valeria and I must journey on our way alone.'

The mention of her daughter had recalled to her mind the one great obstacle that existed to her union with Lord Laurence Grantham, or anybody else. She would never go to another man with a secret burden on her soul, nor would she brand her child's birth with a name of infamy. Once before, she had accepted her God-given charge instead of this world's happiness and honour; and she was ready to do so a second time. Fenella was not the woman to perform her duty by halves.

'Dear Laurence,' she continued affectionately, 'it gives me so much pain to

refuse anything that would give you pleasure; but what you ask me is an impossibility. Pray don't think of it any more. Don't fancy that it can ever come to pass. It is a shame that you should spoil all your prospects in life for the sake of a woman who can never be more to you than she is at present.'

'Well, I suppose I must *try*,' he said, with a sigh. 'I ought to be used to disappointment by this time; but you are so kind to me, that I keep on hoping and hoping that, after all, you will change your mind.'

'I shall *never* do that, dear. And oh! Laurence, if you could persuade yourself to marry some one else, it would make me so much happier!'

'I conclude it will come to that some day, Fenella. I suppose that my rank and position make it incumbent on me to marry; and a man can't spend the whole of his life sighing after a shadow. But the most beautiful and fascinating

woman in Europe would not satisfy me after you. You have been my ideal of womanhood from the very first, and I am afraid I shall make but a grumpy sort of husband to any one else.'

Fenella's eyes were filled with tears, but she kept her head turned the other way, and would not let Lord Laurence see them.

'Oh no, you won't,' she said cheerfully. 'I believe you'll make one of the best and dearest husbands in the world! And you'll come to the Engaldine with Janie and me, won't you?'

'I suppose I *must*, if you say so; but you had better not take me near a church, Fenella, or I'll drag you in and marry you whether you will or no.'

They were laughing together over this brilliant sally—so little will make people laugh when their tears are close at hand—when a servant entered the room and presented a letter to Fenella. As she took it and glanced at the address, Lord Laurence saw her cheeks grow crimson.

His jealousy was immediately excited, and he rose suddenly from his chair.

'You have business to attend to, I see,' he said suspiciously, 'so perhaps I had better leave you.'

'Good-bye, dear Laurence,' she said vaguely, as she held out her unoccupied hand.

He shook it, and left the room without another word—his honest cheeks aflame with the discovery he imagined he had made.

'There's another man in the wind,' he thought to himself. 'I was *certain* of it, although she has denied it again and again. What else should make her so persistently refuse my offers? I wonder who the d—l he is! Some beastly foreigner, I suppose; some long-haired professional she's been singing with at the opera. And yet I can hardly think that. Fenella has always held herself so much above her surroundings. It's more likely to be some swell who has fallen

in love with her from the front. I might have guessed how it would be from the beginning. *What* am I, after all, that such a woman should be reserved for me?'

But Lord Laurence went straight, nevertheless, to see his cousin Lady Marjoram, and make arrangements for joining her party to the Engaldine. As he modestly put it, he thought he might be of some service to the two ladies on their travels; and the Countess (who was well aware of his hopeless passion for Fenella) joked him unmercifully on his newly-acquired taste for trying the duties of a *chasseur*.

Meanwhile, Fenella sat with Geoffrey Doyne's letter in her hand. She had not heard of nor seen him since the communication she had received and disregarded at Brighton, and she had hardly expected he would write to her again. And yet she had felt that he was near. Some unknown, inexplicable sensation had told her that Colonel Doyne lingered about the

places where she sung, and tracked her footsteps backward and forward to her home. Some intuition, which she would have found it impossible to define, had revealed to her on more than one occasion, that when she poured forth her melodies, *his* ears were opened to receive them, and she had thrown twice her usual amount of passion and pathos into the song for the knowledge. But she had kept it strictly to herself. It had only been a dream—an echo from the far distance—a proof of the sympathy which must exist (so long as life continues) between two people who have been all in all to one another. Yet she did not think that he would have made a second appeal to *her* whose appeals in the past he had so studiously disregarded. She tore open the note, and saw from the address that he was in London. But he wrote more formally, more diffidently, than he had done before—

15th July —.

'My dear Mrs Barrington,—About

four months ago I sent you a letter from St Leonards, to which I received no answer. Perhaps I did not deserve to receive one, but the penalty for our errors does not fall any the lighter because it is merited. Will you think me presumptuous if, disregarding your silence, I ask for an interview before you leave town? Believe me, that I will make no reference to any subject which you may wish avoided. I only want to hear you tell me that the past is forgiven.—I am, yours truly,

'GEOFFREY DOYNE.'

The feelings of Fenella as she read these words were very different from what they had been upon the former occasion. The tears welled up freely to her eyes, and dropped in large, hot splashes on the paper, and made great blots of Geoffrey Doyne's appeal for mercy. Her heart could be proud enough where it thought itself insulted; but one look of tenderness

—one syllable breathed in a faltering tone —had the power to transform it into melting wax. She cried heartily over the note she had received, before she answered it; and she wrote the answer at once, without any hesitation or forethought. People who could have seen her emotion and her impetuous action, and did not know the united strength and pliability of her character, would have judged at once that she was ready to receive back her old lover with open arms, and, in condoning the past, to commence a fresh life with him of renewed passion, and trust for the future. Even Colonel Doyne himself, could he have watched her tears, and the kisses she pressed upon the letter he had sent her, might have augured favourably for the welcome he would receive at her hands. And they would all have been mistaken. They would have accepted the sacred homage she paid to the memory of the past for a belief in the possibility of the

present. And Fenella had no more such belief than she had that the bodies of her dead husband and dead child could be raised from their graves and re-clothed with the life of this world. Yet when Geoffrey Doyne received her answer, his eyes sparkled and his cheeks flushed with the renewal of hope conveyed by her acquiescence. She only wrote a few lines, but they gave him leave to see her, and that was (*pro tem.*) sufficient for his happiness.

'My dear Colonel Doyne,—I have sinned too much in this life myself to be able to afford to refuse forgiveness to any fellow-creature. If, therefore, it will be any comfort to you to see me, I will remain at home to-morrow afternoon for that purpose.—I am, yours faithfully,

'Fenella Barrington.'

Geoffrey Doyne never went to bed that night. He was gazing at her from his

opera stall all the evening; and when he was compelled to lose sight of her and return to his chambers, he paced up and down the floor like some caged animal, as he remembered proof after proof of Fenella's former love for him, and thought it would be an easy task to persuade her that, throughout all he had been faithful to her, and deserved to claim the reward of his fidelity. And the child, too—he should see his child. And if the mother's affection for himself had been somewhat dimmed by the sorrows, and disappointments of the passing years, surely she could never refuse to let him assume his rightful position as protector and guardian of their child.

But this was the very thing which Fenella had determined to prevent. She believed that her own life would be happier if she were at peace with Geoffrey Doyne, but she had no intention of letting him know of the existence of his child, for Valeria's sake, as well as her own.

The time was past when he could have been of service to her in that particular, and now he had a family of children, and there was no need to excite covetousness in his heart for the possession of her one ewe lamb.

And therefore, in order to avoid even the remotest chance of recognition, and especially to keep Eliza Bennett out of the way during the visit of Colonel Doyne, Fenella despatched both nurse and child to the Alexandra Palace early in the day, with orders not to return until the fireworks had been let off in the evening. And thus the coast was clear, and she sat down, with a calm exterior, but a fiercely throbbing heart, to await the coming of this one creature who had made and marred the world for her.

He arrived to the minute. She heard his familiar voice, now a little deepened by the lapse of time, asking for her by name; and the room went spinning round, and the bright July sunshine seemed suddenly to

have gone out and darkened, as she listened to his step ascending the stairs.

'Colonel Doyne, madam!' announced the servant.

Fenella rose, and placed her hands upon the back of her chair, as if she could not trust herself to advance and meet him. She was dressed in black, with a bunch of fragrant tea-roses in her bosom; her hair was hanging in a thick plait down her back; she looked (at the first glance) almost as youthful as she had done in the by-gone days. Geoffrey Doyne came forward quickly, and took her hands in his —both of her hands. And so they met,— these two, who had parted fourteen years before upon the sands of Ines-cedwyn.

He was the first to speak.

'Let me look at you!' he said huskily. 'Let me see if you are changed. Not much! even in all this while! There are the same eyes, the same hair, the same mouth with its grave smile. And yet there is something gone! What is it?

What is it that I miss, Fenella, that used to be there before?'

'My faith,' she answered sadly. 'I left it in your charge. What have you done with it?'

He dropped her hands suddenly and turned away. She saw that he was moved, and she dreaded the effect of yielding to emotion.

'Come!' she said cheerfully; 'this is not a lively way of celebrating our reunion. We have not met to cry over each other, I hope. Geoffrey! we are both too old for that. Let me look at you in my turn. Why! what business have you with grey hair at your time of life? Let me see! you are only six-and-thirty. Indeed, you should have taken better care of yourself than that!'

'I have had no one for whom it was worth my while to take care of myself, Fenella,' he said brokenly.

'You have no right to say so,' she answered promptly; 'for until lately you

had a wife who loved you with her whole heart. Few men can boast as much. And I, who heard her speak of you in the last days of her life, can testify to her devotion.'

'It was only another reproach to me,' he said; 'another drop of bitterness in my overladen cup.'

'Don't you think you are a little morbid on the subject?' demanded Fenella. 'It would be folly in me to pretend to misunderstand you, Geoffrey! Of course, I know what you allude to. You would tell me that the fact of having been my ruin has cast a shadow on your whole life. So it has on mine. We would undo the past, both of us (if we could), by the sacrifice of our heart's blood. But that would not undo it. Let us, then, try and forget it. It is all over long ago. Even the effects of it are passed away. Let us be thankful that it is so, and live the remainder of our lives in peace.'

'But are the effects of it passed away?' he inquired gloomily.

'I hope so, and if not, let us try and make them pass. When God forgives, Geoffrey, He forgives unlimitedly. He does not for ever throw the remembrance of our sins in our teeth. Let us forgive each other in the same way, without reserve, without limit, and take the blessings that remain to us with grateful hearts. And we have many left, you know. You (for example) have your dear children to bring up to be the comfort of your age.'

'I have *one* child,' said Geoffrey significantly, 'whom I have never seen.'

Fenella was thrown off her guard.

'Who told you that?' she demanded.

He came up to her side.

'Tell me the truth,' he said earnestly; 'is it not so? Ten years ago, Fenella, before I returned to India, I received a letter, signed "*Eliza Bennett*," which told me that our daughter was alive, and that the information I had received at the time of her birth was a lie. Was that letter true, or was it not?'

'*Bennett wrote and told you that our child was alive?*' said Fenella incredulously. 'I never heard that she had done such a thing until now.'

'She has known how to keep her own counsel, then; but it is the case. Her letter reached me at Ryelands, ten years ago.'

Fenella regarded him solemnly in the face.

'You heard that she was alive, *ten years ago!*' she repeated; 'and yet you have never asked to see her, nor inquired after her, until this day! Oh, it is impossible—incredible! Could you (or any man) receive such a piece of intelligence, and not be moved by it—not anxious to learn if your child were ill or well, happy or miserable, reared in the fear of God, or left to go her own way to heaven or hell? Geoffrey, I *cannot* believe it! And *you* too! *You* who, I have heard, lead such a religious life—*you* who are looked up to in your regiment as a very pattern of morality and

virtue—who conduct the services for your men, and lead their hymns, and give up your time to preach to them on their duties to their neighbours,—is it possible *you* could leave your own child to grow up like a weed by the wayside? Geoffrey, when you stand, at the last day, before the throne of God, *whose* soul do you think He will first demand at your hands—your soldiers, or that of the creature you brought into the world?'

'I knew she was safe with you,' he muttered.

'You knew no such thing,' she retorted. 'You cared no more for her soul than you did for mine. When you met me at Inescedwyn, Geoffrey, I was what the world calls "innocent;" what *I* should call "ignorant"—ignorant of the amount of cruelty one human creature can practise towards another. But I was utterly godless. I had no religion of any sort, and you knew it. *You* were my god, and you proved to be made of clay; *you* were my

faith, and you scattered it to the winds. What sort of a mother do you imagine you made of me, to whom to intrust the training and culture of your child? You left me without hope, or faith in God or man; and then you tell me that you did not consider it necessary to see after your child, because you knew she would be safe in my hands! I wonder you were not afraid that I should strangle her at her birth, lest she should live to grow up like her father!'

She spoke so bitterly — so differently from what he had expected — that she staggered him. Was this the loving, soft-hearted girl who had placed her heart in his hands at Ines-cedwyn?

'Oh, Fenella!' he exclaimed, 'I deserve every reproach you can heap upon me. I feel—I see—how selfish, how wrong I have been. But if it be not too late, let me try and redeem the past; let me remedy the evil I have done.'

'You *cannot*,' she said sadly. 'That is

the sorrow and the pity of such things; they cannot be undone. You men imagine that you can break a woman's heart, and ruin her life, and destroy her faith in everything that is good and true, and then (when it is convenient to yourselves) that you can patch the evil up with a few tears and kisses, and perhaps a marriage-ring. But you might as well try to raise the dead, Geoffrey. You killed the Fenella you knew at Ines-cedwyn with your own hand. You will never see her again (unless, indeed, she may be given back to you in heaven), nor be able to repair the wrong you did her; for she no longer lives upon this earth. The voice that speaks to you now is that of quite another woman.'

'Then let me take that other woman!' he cried passionately, 'who is a thousand times dearer to me for all the trouble she has passed through for my sake. Let me take her, and try and fancy she is my Fenella, and heap upon her the devotion

of a lifetime, until she has forgotten the sin I sinned against her.'

Fenella shook her head.

'It does not depend upon that,' she said. 'I could overlook my own share of sorrow easily enough. Geoffrey, it was not in *loving* me you sinned against me; it was in *leaving* me.'

'Do I not feel it?' he exclaimed. 'Have I not felt it through all my mistaken life? I have never been married but once, Fenella; *that* was the true marriage—the marriage that God might have blessed and angels smiled upon, when we gave our hearts to each other upon the golden sands.'

'Yes,' she acquiesced softly, '*that* was the true marriage—the marriage of perfect faith and love and unselfishness; and it can never be repeated. We might as well try to taste again the pleasures of spring when the autumn leaves are falling.'

'And are there to be no pleasures left for autumn, then?' he exclaimed.

'Plenty, I think, if we know where to look for them; but they cannot be the same as those of spring. Geoffrey, do you remember the landslip at Ines-cedwyn, where we had our first picnic, and the apple blossoms showered down upon our heads as we sat and talked together? They were very lovely, were they not? But how soon they were gone! I have often thought since how much they resembled our love! It was just as fresh and fair, and it perished as soon.'

'No, no, Fenella! It did not perish. It never has perished even now!'

'Well, let me say, then, that we had to bury it. It would have been better if it *had* perished before we were compelled to hide it away. But we might as soon attempt to bring back those faded blossoms, as to raise the love we felt for each other then.'

'Let us grant, then, that it is gone. Is it not still possible to build up a better —a more enduring love upon its ashes?

Hear me out, Fenella. I know that I have behaved cruelly to you from the beginning. I do not wish to offer the slightest excuse for my conduct, nor to suppose that I can ever make amends for the unhappy past. But — will you some day be my wife? Will you give me hope that, in due course of time, I may have the opportunity of proving to you how deeply I repent the wrong I did you, and of feeling, when I see you once more happy and contented, that I have, in some slight measure, atoned for my sin?'

'I can believe that you are sorry,' she said, 'and that you wish to atone for it, without becoming your wife; and I do not think that that step would be conducive to the happiness of either of us.'

'For the child's sake, then?' he urged. 'In the name of our child, I beg of you to let me assume my rightful position as her protector and guardian.'

But still Fenella shook her head.

'I do not think it would be for the child's happiness either,' she said.

'You love me no longer,' he exclaimed despairingly. 'I see how it is. My unmanly conduct when last we met has killed every atom of love you possessed for me. And yet—once—once—you refused me *nothing*,' he added brokenly.

Fenella's spirit rose at the accusation.

'You are right,' she exclaimed—'*once* I refused you nothing; and what was your requital, Geoffrey? Do you *yet* know what your falsehood and your cowardly betrayal did for me? It was not only my faith in you and every man that it destroyed; it stripped my life, one by one, of every blessing that might have succeeded it. It placed a barrier between my mother and myself that existed till the day she died. It drove me forth from the home of my husband, who, as soon as he knew the truth, refused to own me any longer as his wife. It has prevented me (even up to yesterday)

from accepting the affection of a man whom I feel I might *learn* to love, because I cannot deceive him, and I will not brand my child with the name of bastard! At every turn in life the wrong you did me has met me like the angel with the flaming sword, to turn me out of Paradise. And yet you imagine you can wipe out the remembrance of all this by the offer of your hand! Why, the very fact of living every day in your society would prevent my acquiring the power to forget!'

'But you love our child?' interposed Colonel Doyne eagerly. 'My treachery has not been able to turn your heart against her?'

Fenella's eyes suffused with tears.

'*Love our child!*' she repeated. 'Oh, Geoffrey, if you only knew *how* I love her! My precious, precious child; my only hope and comfort in this world.'

At the thought of Valeria, and all she had suffered for her sake, the mother's

heart gave way, and leaning her head upon her hand, she cried quietly to herself.

'Fenella!' exclaimed Geoffrey, 'is it possible you can love the child so much, and yet have lost all feeling for her unhappy father?'

Fenella lifted her eyes to his, with the tears still standing on her cheeks.

'Oh no! I never said I had; I never denied that I love you. I have done so from the beginning; I shall do so to the end. But that does not mean that I could marry you. Geoffrey, it is too late. When we first met, you might have made of me what you chose; but we have drifted apart. The world has hardened us, our own feelings have changed us; we are not the same people that we were. How would you—a man who has been so careful to bear a character for religion and propriety before the world—like to hear it said that your wife had been a public actress, and not only that, but a woman upon whose former life a stain had rested?

For it *has* rested on me, Geoffrey, and it will rest so till I die.'

'The stain *I* brought upon you?' he groaned.

'Yes, dear, the stain you brought upon me,' she said quietly; 'but you could not tell the world that—you could not proclaim in public that Valeria is your daughter, and that all my troubles were incurred upon that account. It would only make matters worse instead of better, and it would be a cruel injustice to the child. For *her* sake alone, I would refuse the offer you have made me.'

'You have crushed me,' he replied brokenly, 'but at least you will give me one consolation—you will let me know and embrace my child?'

Fenella started. She had hardly anticipated he would ask for this. And her first impulse was to refuse him.

'I think it will be wiser not,' she said. 'You are very emotional, Geoffrey—I remember that of old—and easily upset,

and I am fearful lest you should betray your identity to Valeria.'

'Do you suppose I would shock her innocence by such a revelation?'

'Not intentionally, of course; but Valeria is very womanly of her age, and apt to draw her own deductions from everything she sees. And—and—she resembles you so closely, that you could scarcely meet her without feeling some sort of emotion at the sight!'

She crossed to another part of the room as she spoke, and returning, placed a coloured photograph in his hands. It represented Valeria and herself—the girl with her head leaning against her mother's knee. Geoffrey Doyne gazed at it in silence for a few minutes, and then raised the portrait to his lips. The action moved Fenella as nothing else on his part could have done.

'Yes, she is *your* child, dear,' she whispered softly, as she laid one hand upon his head.

He caught the hand and carried it to his lips.

'Fenella, my darling,' he pleaded, 'you will let me see our child, my only daughter? Don't make me think I am such an accursèd thing in your sight as not to be fit to speak to my own child.'

There was a ring in his voice that reminded her of the youthful tones that had once so fascinated her, and all her great love for him sprung to the surface.'

'*Accursèd!* Oh, Geoffrey, don't use such a word to me. If you could but read my heart, you would know that (spite of all the trouble and the sorrow it has passed through) it would part with everything it possessed in this world, sooner than with its memory of you. Oh, Geoffrey! you were my first love. There can never be another in this world to me like you.'

She was weeping freely now, and he caught her in his arms, and kissed her passionately, and held her to his heart

until her tears were stayed. But if Geoffrey Doyne argued from that that his eloquence had overcome her former reasoning, he deceived himself. It had only opened the floodgates of her overburdened heart.

'You *shall* see her, dear,' she said, when he had released her, and she had dried her eyes, 'of course you shall see her; but it must not be here. You would be far more likely to betray yourself in a room than on a public promenade. But if you will be in Kensington Gardens, on the Broad Walk, the day after to-morrow, at four o'clock, I will bring Valeria to you there. It will be a very trying time for both of us, Geoffrey, and I shall be glad when it is over.'

'I long so much to see her!' said Colonel Doyne. 'I have thought and dreamt so much of her! My little girl! She is the only one I have, Fenella.'

'I am glad of that,' she answered simply; 'and if it is not wrong, Geoffrey,

I shall wish, when you marry again, that the second family may be all boys too.'

'I shall never marry again, Fenella! I shall live on the memory of your sweet face and voice for the rest of my life.'

'That is foolish, Geoffrey, and it is not true. You are in the very prime of life! How can you contemplate living alone always? It would be unnatural and wrong! Only, don't have another little girl. Let my little girl and me remain, alone and together, in your heart, to remind you sometimes of the murmuring waters and the golden sands of Inescedwyn.'

'Don't, Fenella, *don't*,' he murmured; 'you are torturing me.'

'Geoffrey,' she continued, 'do you remember when you first told me of your engagement to Jessie Robertson, and we cried together over the misfortune from which we thought there was no escape? Do you remember trying to console me

with some theoretical notion that in another world it would take a man and a woman to make one angel, and that, though we could not be married on earth, we might be incorporated thus for all eternity? And you asked me if it would not be a happier thing to put all our human passions and jealousies to one side, and look forward to such a love that should exist for ever and ever?'

'Did I?' he said, with a sigh.

'Yes! I can remember every word, every look of yours on that occasion. And don't you think we might put your theory into practice now, dear, and remain true and steadfast friends to each other until the time comes for a more perfect union?'

'It is so long in coming,' he said despairingly.

'If we were married now,' continued Fenella, 'we should only be disappointed in each other. I feel and know it. Few married couples can say they have not

been, and it would come harder to us than to most people. We have had so much sorrow on the way, we should expect perfection when we came together —and perfection is not to be had in this world, Geoffrey.'

'I should be content with anything you gave me,' he said, with his blue eyes searching hers.

She lifted up her mouth, and kissed him on those eyes—those eyes which she had once thought resembled heaven in their colour and purity and truth.

'Then I will give you a peep at Valeria,' she said playfully, 'at four o'clock on Thursday, in Kensington Gardens, and you have promised to be content with that.'

The afternoon was waning by this time, and she reminded him that she had to dine before she went to the opera. Geoffrey Doyne looked as if he expected she would ask him to stay and share her meal. It seemed so strange not to

have a right to remain by the side of this woman whom he had owned and deserted. But Fenella did not even allude to the subject.

'We shall meet on Friday,' she said cheerfully; 'till then, adieu.'

'And what am I to do with myself meanwhile?' he murmured.

She caught up the photograph he had been examining, and thrust it in his hand.

'Take that with you,' she whispered. 'I will give it to you, Geoffrey. Take it home, and keep it to remind you sometimes of the girl you loved at Inescedwyn.'

She gazed into his face, with a smile that was almost gay, and he left her presence with a sinking spirit, that seemed to exclude the possibility of hope. Yet, could he but have seen Fenella a moment afterwards, kneeling by her bedside, and sobbing as if her heart would break, he would have known how passionately she

still loved him. But it is so hard — so bitterly hard—to continue to love and to cherish, when respect and esteem have taken their flight for ever.



CHAPTER VII.

AU REVOIR.

'Wait! and Love himself will bring
The drooping flower of knowledge chang'd to fruit
Of wisdom. *Wait!* my faith is large in Time
And that which shapes it to some perfect end.'

Tennyson.

THE interview which Fenella had accorded Geoffrey Doyne in her own house, had not been productive of the pleasure he had anticipated. He had gone to meet her with a heart full of hope and expectation, and he had left her presence labouring under a sense of depression which he found it impossible to dispel. He had kept the

appointment with a cheek flushed with the thought of victory, and he had returned home feeling very much as if he had been conquered instead.

And yet she had been very kind to him; she had been *more* than kind—she had openly showed the depth and fulness of her feelings in meeting him again. But Geoffrey Doyne instinctively felt that she had wept with sorrow for her own disappointed life, rather than with excitement at the prospect of renewed happiness. He had gone to meet the girl who had loved him, even to her own destruction; the girl who had been ductile, and yielding in his hands as spun silk—who would at one time have rather received a blow from him than a kiss from anybody else. He knew that his treachery had darkened all her youth—that it had cast a burden of shame upon her shoulders which he had not attempted to lighten by so much as the lifting of his little finger; and yet he had thought to find her still the same—still,

not only loving and faithful, but ductile, and ready to condone everything, so that she might but lay her head upon his breast again. He had thought to remedy the grief of years (as Fenella herself had told him) with a few kisses and a wedding-ring. And instead of this, he had been met by a woman whom the world had taught wisdom, without hardness ; a woman able and ready to discuss what had passed between them from a philosophic and practical point of view—who could argue quietly on the disadvantages which a nearer connection with him might entail on her child and herself, and seriously point out the evils he had brought upon her, and the impossibility of his ever being in a position to remedy them.

Had Fenella given way to vehement reproaches and tears ; had she inveighed against the misfortunes of her youth, and accused him as the author of them, there might have been some chance that, whilst playing the part of comforter, he

could have persuaded her to allow him to try and redeem the past.

But she had not appealed to him for comfort. She had told him there was no need of cure; she had assured him they were both better as they were; and he knew that she had looked down upon him from a higher eminence, as on something for which she felt pity, mingled with contempt.

Certainly Geoffrey Doyne had never felt smaller than when he crept home from that interview, with the portraits of the two creatures whom he felt to be so much and yet so little, his own possessions, in his hand.

But he had the meeting in the Kensington Gardens to look forward to; and when he thought of it, his spirits revived. What he hoped to gain from it, he could not tell, but assuredly he hoped something. It would lead to other encounters (so he told himself); and when Fenella had once more become intimate with

him, the old fascination would reassert its dominion over her, and she would be compelled to yield to his wishes.

Geoffrey Doyne was well aware that his power over women had not yet come to an end. Though his hair was grey, and his eyes had assumed a colder and sterner expression than they had worn in the old days, the charm of his look and smile remained the same, and he bore that distinguished air with him that the sex value far above handsome features.

But, before all, he trusted to the influence of their child to draw their hearts once more to one another. For a child is an indissoluble link which lasts, not only for this world, but all eternity. The father and mother *who have cared for one another* can surely never ignore the blossom of their mutual love.

As Colonel Doyne dressed himself to go to the Broad Walk on Friday afternoon, a dozen projects floated through

his brain for bringing about another meeting. He would ask Fenella's leave to send the child some presents; to take her to places of amusement; to introduce her to his own family; to do half-a-hundred things, in fact, that were equally impracticable.

He regarded the whole matter from his own point of view, and forgot how extraordinary such propositions would appear to the girl herself, coming from one who was a perfect stranger to her. But they occupied his mind, and kept him from becoming too impatient, as he sat on one of the benches in the Broad Walk for fully an hour before the appointed time.

Valeria was at a loss to understand why her mother was so particular about what she was to wear in Kensington Gardens that afternoon. As a rule, she was so beautifully dressed that Lady Marjoram herself would cry out against Fenella for such reckless extravagance;

but neither the mother nor the nurse ever thought anything too good for the use of their spoiled darling. Any one of Valeria's various costumes would have suited this occasion, and the young lady was rather disposed to be cross because Fenella insisted upon her changing her dress in order to accompany her out walking.

'Mother dear!' she exclaimed, 'am I to put on that white costume and hat that I went to the Horticultural Fête with Aunt Janie in, just to go to those stupid old gardens? Bennett declares you said so; but I'm sure she's mistaken.'

'No, my darling, she is not. I wish you to wear the white dress. And make haste, Valeria! it is half-past three.'

'Where's the hurry, mother dear? Oh, what a bore it is to have to change again. I am sure this *piqué* would do well enough.'

'I want to get to the gardens by four

Valeria; you know we must be home to dinner at five.'

'Why need we go at all, mother dear? What is there to see there?'

'Nothing, my child! only mother wishes you to come; isn't that sufficient?'

An appeal to Valeria's affection invariably had the desired effect, and in a few minutes she appeared in the drawing-room arrayed in the white costume. Fenella thought she had never seen her look prettier, nor more like her father; and her hand trembled as she arranged the tendril curls that lay upon the child's forehead, and mingled with the snowy feather beneath the brim of her hat.

'Come, darling!' she said, with a sudden effort, 'the carriage is waiting. Let us go.'

'What a lovely colour you have in your face, mother dear. Are you happy?' asked Valeria ingenuously.

Fenella stooped down and kissed her.

'Always happy, my sweet,' she mur-

mured, 'whilst my child loves me and is with me,' and taking her hand she led her downstairs.

A few minutes' drive put them down at the entrance to the Broad Walk.

'Wait for us here,' said Fenella to the servant on alighting; and, still holding her child by the hand, she entered the gardens.

Geoffrey Doyne watched them approaching with a fast-beating heart, and as they came opposite to the bench he occupied, he rose and took off his hat.

'Ah! Colonel Doyne,' cried Fenella, raising her eyebrows as if he had been the last person she expected to encounter, 'is that you? What a lovely afternoon! I suppose you have come out, like ourselves, to enjoy the air. By the way, this is my little daughter, Valeria, whom I do not think you have seen before. Val, dear, this gentleman is Colonel Doyne, an old friend of mine. Go and shake hands with him!'

The child advanced at her mother's bidding, and put her hand in that of Geoffrey, looking him full in the face the while, after the manner of children. He was terribly agitated—more so a great deal than the woman who held the deepest reproach she could hurl at him in her hand. His features worked, his frame trembled, his eyes were cast upon the ground; he could not look his child in the face. Fenella was alarmed lest Valeria should observe his want of self-control, and hurriedly took a seat by his side.

'Run on, Val,' she said to her little girl, 'run on to the end of the walk, and come back to us again. I have a few words to say to Colonel Doyne.'

The child obeyed, though rather unwillingly. She did not like the indignity of being sent out of earshot. As soon as she had walked a few paces, Fenella turned to her companion.

'You must be more composed, Geoffrey, or I shall take her home again. It is just

as I feared. You have not sufficient mastery of your feelings to conceal them.'

'I am not sufficient master of myself to feel otherwise than bitterly ashamed when I look upon you two together,' he replied. 'So far I acknowledge you are right.'

'I suppose the feeling will be hard to conquer—at least, at first,' she answered, quietly; 'but try and control it for the short time we shall be here. See, Valeria is coming back to us, and I have no possible excuse for sending her away a second time. Be a man, dear Geoffrey. You wished to see her, and you may not have another opportunity.'

'What do you mean?' he asked quickly.

'We leave London on Monday morning, and start for the Engaldine the week after. Val is looking forward with great pleasure to her trip; are you not?' continued Fenella to the girl, who had again reached her side.

'Oh yes,' said Valeria, 'because mother

is going too, you know, and Aunt Janie and the boys, and perhaps Lord Laurence. Do you know Lord Laurence?' she asked, turning to Geoffrey Doyne.

'No. Is he a friend of yours?'

'Oh, he is my cousin—at least he was papa's cousin; and he is the friend of all of us, but most of all of mother's. Isn't he, mother dear? He is always bringing you flowers, and presents, and all sorts of things,'

Colonel Doyne turned, and looked at Fenella, whose face had somewhat flushed under the remarks of her child.

'Is that the happy man?' he inquired. in a low voice.

'No! not he — nor any one,' she answered. 'I have had enough of that sort of thing to last me a lifetime.'

He sighed, and turned to Valeria.

'And so you are going to the Engaldine? Would you like me to go with you, Valeria?'

The child reddened, and glanced at Fenella.

'If mother wishes it,' she said—not knowing how far she might compromise them both by a more decided answer.

'I think our party is large enough already, Valeria, and we have no room for more. Besides, Colonel Doyne was only joking with you. He could not leave England if he would. He has four little boys to care for and look after.'

'I am going to send the whole tribe to school,' said the father, with a look of annoyance. 'A man in my position can hardly be expected to mount guard over a nursery full of children.'

'I suppose not, poor little things!' said Fenella compassionately.

'And they will never have a second mother now,' he added significantly.

'Second mothers can never replace the first,' she replied.

Geoffrey Doyne grew impatient. She seemed more inaccessible to-day than she had been on the first occasion of their reunion.

'How long are you to be away?' he said. 'You never told me on Wednesday that you were about to leave London.'

'Did I not? I thought you would have guessed that we should go away at the close of the season. I have several provincial engagements to fulfil before I join Lady Marjoram in the Engaldine, which I hope will be about the beginning of August. And we shall stay there at least two months, if not more.'

'Why do you drag this child about the country with you?'

'What am I to do with her? We have never been separated yet.'

'Leave her with me.'

'*Colonel Doyne!*' ejaculated Fenella, in a tone of reproach, 'is this the way you keep your promise to me?'

'Is there anything very strange in an old friend offering to take charge of your child during your absence? Wouldn't you like to come and stay with me, Val, whilst mamma is in the country, and go to

theatres, and ride on a pony, and have lots of presents?'

'That I should,' said Val unhesitatingly. 'I want to ride a pony so much; but mother is afraid I shall tumble off and hurt myself. And I like boys too, Colonel Doyne! You know I have never had a brother or sister to play with, and I should be very kind to your little boys. And I like you too,' she added more shyly, 'because you have such kind eyes.'

'My darling child,' cried Geoffrey Doyne impulsively.

'Valeria! what are you saying?' exclaimed Fenella, almost in the same breath. 'You are talking too fast. You are forgetting yourself! How could you go and stay with a gentleman who is almost a stranger to you?'

In her agitation and excitement, a new fear presented itself to her. What if Geoffrey, not content with having stripped her of almost every earthly possession, should rob her of the only

comfort she had left — the affection of her child.

'It is nonsense! it is folly, Colonel Doyne! You shouldn't have mentioned such a thing,' she continued hotly. 'I will never allow Valeria to be separated from myself.'

'Then you go too, mother dear,' urged the child.

'No, I can't go too,' replied Fenella almost crossly.

'What a shame!' cried her spoiled daughter; 'and when I want so much to ride that pony. Never mind, Colonel Doyne! I'll *make* mother go some day —see if I don't.'

'Yes, Valeria, *make* her come,' he repeated, with a smile of hope irradiating his features.

Fenella rose from her seat.

'It is time for us to go,' she said. 'Come, Val, say good-bye to Colonel Doyne.'

Geoffrey took the girl's hand in his.

'I wonder which present you would like me to give you best,' he said musingly; 'a gold watch or a bracelet?'

'Oh! a gold watch, Colonel Doyne; a dear, little, tiny gold watch, with blue stones in it, like Uncle Marjoram gave to Lily on her last birthday. Because mother has bracelets, you know, and I can wear them; but she never will lend me her watch. *Do* give me a watch, Colonel Doyne.'

'Indeed, Colonel Doyne will give you no such thing,' cried Fenella angrily; 'and I am surprised at him for offering to do so. *You* are but a child, without any knowledge of etiquette; but he—*he* ought to know better.'

'Oh, mother dear, how cross you are,' said Valeria.

The truth spoken by her daughter recalled her to herself. She blushed scarlet, and stammered. She had, indeed, forgotten what was due to a gentleman whom she had acknowledged to be her friend —whom she knew to be so much more.

'If I have indeed offended you, Mrs Barrington—' commenced Colonel Doyne.

'No, no! do as you like. I forgot—you have a right,' she answered, in a broken voice.

'She says you *may*,' exclaimed Valeria, exultantly.

'Very well, if your mother says I *may*, I will; but, Valeria, in all things you must consult *her* first—remember that,' said Geoffrey Doyne.

Fenella felt as if she could not remain another minute. She turned to her child and said,—

'Valeria, when I was a little girl, not much older than yourself, this gentleman was—was—fond of me, and—very kind to me. I cannot thank him for it as I would, but you can do so for me. Kiss him before we go, and tell him that mother and you—thank him for—all that he has done.

The child, fearless and impetuous by nature, turned at once to Geoffrey Doyne and flung her arms about his neck.

'Mother says I am to thank you,' she exclaimed, 'and I do. I think you are a good, kind man; and I am to have the watch, ain't I? and I will *make* her go some day and stay with you.'

He kissed her several times warmly, and then Fenella took her hand and drew her away from him, and they had already gone some little distance before he remembered that this was their last interview for perhaps several months, and Valeria's had been the only farewell he had received. The thought struck him with a sudden anguish, and he sank down in a disconsolate attitude upon the bench from which he had risen. What was the child to him, after all, compared to the mother? Why should he value or love her, excepting for Fenella's sake?

The woman he was mourning after guessed his thoughts. Before they had reached the gate she turned, and saw him sitting where they had left him, with his head bowed, and his eyes bent upon the

ground — forsaken and alone. With quick impulse, she bade Valeria wait her coming, and hurried back to him. He had hardly time to realise she had returned, before he heard her sweet voice speak his name.

'Geoffrey,' she said, 'Geoffrey, forgive me! I should not have spoken so, perhaps; but she is all I have! A miser does not watch his gold with more eager and suspicious eyes than I watch over the affections of my child. If I seem avaricious and grasping, remember she is the sole thing that you have left me.'

'You will not even let me share her love?' he said sadly.

'Not *now!* It is so new, so fresh a thought! I cannot grasp it *now*. But some day, Geoffrey, when the feelings we have in the present are calmer and more reasonable, I will ask you to be her friend and mine. Be content to wait the time when it may be so.'

'And meanwhile—' he said, in a faltering voice.

'Meanwhile, you have your children and your God. Come, sweetheart, look up and be brave! Surely *all* is not lost, because I have not enough faith left to trust my future in your hands. Think, Geoffrey—*think*, at the outside, how short life is, and that beyond this troublesome world there looms the great Infinity, and rest assured that, when once we reach it, I shall return to you without fear.'

She pressed his hand and left him, and as he raised his eyes—misty with unshed tears—to watch her figure to the last, he saw her clasp her child's hand and turn back at the gate to wave him her farewell.

So they passed out together, the mother and the child, and faded from his view, as the vision of his love had faded from hers upon the Ines-cedwyn sands.

THE END.

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